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"The HEART ON THE MIRROR"

by

ALEXANDER MORRISON

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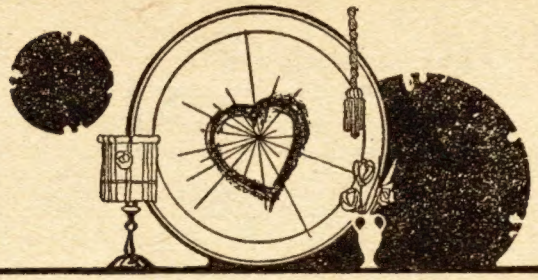

"The HEART on the MIRROR"

by Alexander Morrison

CHAPTER ONE

MONSIEUR ROCHECARBON walked leisurely up the Rue Bref from the Loire River, his soft felt hat pushed carelessly back on his head, for the day was unseasonably warm. He was mumbling inaudibly and pointing with a Malacca cane at one object after another as if to show himself various points of interest in the old, crooked street or among the hideous façades of the crowded stone houses which almost pushed each other into the road. From the tiny feather in his hat to the spats which half covered his dust-powdered shoes, he was dressed in gray, a color selected to minimize an annoying corpulence which threatened to destroy a lingering illusion of youth in his figure; but his large close-set eyes were of an unusually bright blue, adding, even at a distance, a sort of distinction to his otherwise neutral appearance. The woman in the café noted this as she tilted her glass to drain the last drop of cognac left by some careless customer, and muttered, "But the eyes, they do not match the Monsieur."

Except for these two figures the Rue Bref was deserted and so still that a sharp, explosive report like the backfire of an automobile in some nearby street caused Rochecarbon to peer suspiciously into the tunnel-like entrance at which his stick was pointing. This was a queer passage which burrowed through the side of the café and gave access to a courtyard within, thus enabling some enterprising builder to fill the center of an otherwise hollow block with still more ugly houses.

"Queer old place," muttered Rochecarbon with a shrug. "Even a little noise like that makes one think of revolver shots and sudden death. Queer old street, for that matter. Anything out of the ordinary might happen in it."

Idly he sauntered into the tunnel and paced its length, mechanically estimating the distance as about 25 meters. In the inner court three healthily dirty children were playing, and a frowsy woman sat on a doorstep with a baby asleep on her knee. Rochecarbon smiled paternally at them all, then returned to the street with an air of having successfully completed a little adventure into the unknown.

"I wonder that Monsieur Beauté still lives on such a street. But he keeps his fortress well closed to it, at least."

Rochecarbon glanced quizzically at the house, which was entirely surrounded by a high wall. Two massive wooden gates gave entrance to the enclosure within; the one he was just passing opened into a small rear yard which terminated in the wall of the

tunnel, the other into a miniature court garden.

Approaching the latter gate, Rochecarbon pulled out his watch.

"Not yet two o'clock? Then Rochecarbon shall be early by fifteen minutes—for the first time!"

He chuckled to himself as he tugged at the heavy iron handle which announced his presence with a loud clatter of a bell. After a rather long pause in which he studied the curiously wrought handle of the gate as if he were seeing it for the first time, he rang again.

"Mm! Beauté said two o'clock, sure enough. I wonder if he is not here yet."

Once again he rang, this time pulling the handle several times in succession, but there was no response. Half turning to walk away, his eye caught sight of some moving object beyond the ell in the wall which hid the rear gate from view and, with a rapidity unexpected in so heavy a person, he reached the rear gate just as Jean, Monsieur Beauté's servant, rushed into the yard.

"Jean!" called Rochecarbon.

Jean stopped so abruptly that he almost lost his balance, whirled about, and stared at Rochecarbon. He was a slight, precise-looking man, still active and quick in his motions, although his face was seamed by forty years of service in Monsieur Beauté's service. But now his whole body was trembling, his face was gray with agonized terror, and his small black eyes were wild and bulging.

"Monsieur Beauté — the studio!" he panted brokenly.

Without a word Rochecarbon pushed past him, ran up the three steps into the hall and disappeared into the silent house. One keen glance showed nothing out of the ordinary here, but on the threshold of the studio he stopped abruptly. It was a large, high-posted room wainscotted with white, heavily carved panels and papered in a rich gray. Its tall French windows flooded it with light which, with the meager furnishings, added to its air of emptiness and size. But now dark red stains traced a pathway across the room to the fireplace, above which hung a huge mirror, its surface marred by jagged cracks, radiating like the twisted spokes of a wheel whose hub was a bullet, still embedded in the broken glass. But there was no one there.

Turning about, Rochecarbon seized Jean by the shoulders as the latter stumbled blindly toward him.

"Where is Beauté? What has happened?"

There was nothing leisurely or ruminative about Rochecarbon now; his tone was sharp, commanding, and his whole manner was keenly alert.

"He disappeared—into the street."

"Who, Beauté?"

Jean shook his head helplessly and gulped noisily.

"Come, compose yourself." Rochecarbon spoke less crisply, perceiving Jean's almost paralyzing fear. "What happened?"

"There was a shot. I ran down—but the studio was empty. The mirror—broken. I heard a noise—a man——"

"Wait! Answer my questions. Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"But one story above."

"You came down at once?"

"Almost." Jean struggled to speak clearly. "Perhaps I hesitated an instant."

"A minute?"

"Perhaps."

"And then?"

"Monsieur Beauté had been here all day. But when I ran in the room it was empty and the mirror——" He shuddered convulsively.

"Go on."

"I heard a noise—the back door slammed. I ran out. A man was just hurrying into the street. I followed—but he had disappeared."

Already Rochecarbon was hurrying into the street through the back yard. Pausing at the mouth of the tunnel after a hasty glance up and down the road, he called to the woman who sat in the café staring at him and fingering an empty glass:

"Has any one passed here?"

"But yes," she simpered. "You yourself."

"Any one else?"

"The funny man with his drunk friend——"

She checked herself with a hiccough and waved helplessly toward the tunnel.

Rochecarbon covered the length of the deserted passage in a few swift strides, glancing about the dull walls as he went. Being slightly higher in the middle than at the ends, the passage absorbed rather than reflected whatever light managed to push in at its hollow mouths, but it was obviously empty. The children and women were still in the courtyard, but all denied any man had entered from the tunnel, except himself, during the past hour or more.

Hastening back to the woman in the café, Rochecarbon demanded sternly: "Come, now, you swear two men went in there?"

He would have shaken her by the shoulder, but she drew herself unsteadily to her feet, swaying and grasping the back of a chair for support. For a moment she eyed him blearily; then she swore, but in a different manner than his question had implied. Letting the storm pass, he tried another question, but she only relapsed into a sullen stupor.

Disgusted and baffled, Rochecarbon rejoined Jean, who sat helpless and cowering on the lowest step of the stairs.

"Did you find him?" Jean managed to gasp huskily.

"No. You looked everywhere?"

Jean nodded.

"You went into the tunnel?"

"It was dark there. But I went in." He shuddered and drew closer like a frightened child. "You, too, looked there?"

"No one had been through it."

Jean sighed, as if relieved from a fear of lurking danger, then accompanied Rochecarbon into the studio in a desire not to be left alone.

"You are sure Beauté was here?"

"He called to me but a moment before—before the shot, telling me to admit you only."

"Then it must have been the shot I heard after all," mused Rochecarbon. "If I had only been a few minutes sooner!"

Jean wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and nodded.

"And you saw nothing when you came down? Then the assassin must have hidden somewhere. Well, we'll see about that presently."

Carefully avoiding the stains on the floor Rochecarbon approached the cracked mirror to examine the bullet which was firmly embedded there. It had struck the glass on an angle and sunk into the wall so solidly that nothing but digging out the plaster could remove it, and around the jagged hole had been roughly painted on the glass a large vermilion heart!

For a moment Rochecarbon studied this strange sign in amazement, then proceeded to a minute search of the room. Beginning with the fireplace, he found there the brush with which the heart had evidently been painted and, among the still slightly warm ashes, two half-charred bits of paper which he carefully placed in his wallet. The brush, however, was so smeared with paint and ashes that there was no hope of finding finger marks on it, so he put it aside. While stooping he examined the hearth rug with its clotted pool of blood from which the uneven trail of stains led across the room and into the hall.

Following this with his eyes, he was just in time to see Jean pick up a revolver from the floor near the door.

"Don't touch that!" he called, but it was too late, for Jean was already fumbling it in his hands. "You fool, now you've obliterated any finger marks there might have been on it. Wait, stay where you are and don't move or you'll spoil those traces on the floor."

Humbly Jean stood still, the revolver in his outstretched hand.

"I didn't know. I saw it, and wanted to help."

"Well, it's too late now. But don't touch a thing," answered Rochecarbon briefly as he crossed to where Jean waited.

"It—it is Monsieur Beauté's own revolver, sir."

"I know it."

Rochecarbon broke it open and found two cartridges had been discharged.

"You say you heard only one shot, Jean?"

"I—I think so. But I was startled—confused. There may have been more. I don't know."

"Why can't people keep their heads in a crisis," muttered Rochecarbon savagely to himself as he renewed his search after wrapping the weapon in his handkerchief and placing it in his pocket."

One other object rewarded his endeavors, a crumpled paper which had fallen behind the small writing-desk. Carefully smoothing out the torn sheet, he read in Monsieur Beauté's familiar scrawl the following note:

DEAR ROCHECARBON: I need your help. A horrible fear hangs over me at what I have learned—or think I have discovered.

Come to me quickly. I turn to you in my hour of need. Help me, friend, stand between me and my beloved son once more as you have done before.

If I have misunderstood him and his threats or intentions, then I deserve the death which——

Twice Rochecarbon read this unfinished appeal before he placed it with the charred fragments in his pocket, then grimly followed the incriminating blood-stains across the hall into a sort of store-room at the foot of the stairs. It was littered with furniture, each piece shrouded in a ghost-like covering, and against its walls were stacked numerous dust-covered canvases, some unused, others daubed with half-finished paintings. From one of the chairs the sheet had been violently ripped away, while closer inspection proved a strip had been torn from its border, leaving a few drops of scarcely dried blood on the frayed edge.

"Ah," he mumbled, "some one—the murderer in all probability—made a bandage for his own wound while he hid here; then, hearing Jean in the studio, he escaped. But where? And the body of Beauté, what of that? Or was there a body at all?"

Methodically he searched the whole house with Jean, who had somewhat recovered from his fright, at his heels, but nothing further was discovered. After closing the studio door, he called a gendarme to guard the house, instructed Jean to rest a while, then began a thorough examination of the grounds. An empty box in the rear yard suggested the possibility of a man scaling the wall and escaping into the neighboring house, but that was scarcely conclusive.

Tirelessly Rochecarbon searched each of the surrounding houses, questioned every man, woman and child in the block and street, but no one had seen any stranger or suspicious character in the vicinity. At last, weary and baffled, he set off down the street in the gathering dusk. Twenty minutes later he entered the office of Monsieur Goudet, Chef d'Intelligence, and seated himself silently before the desk at which the latter was busily writing.

"Good!" exclaimed Monsieur Goudet with a sigh of relief as he tucked a large card upon which he had been writing into a metal file-box and snapped shut its cover. "I write 'finis' and bury one more child of the devil. Andre Carron's bloody knife has been wiped clean for the last time, and another undiscovered criminal is discovered! You remember him, eh, the man who left no clue? But, Mon Dieu, is this magnificent display of spring fashions intended for my personal benefit, or has the spring perhaps touched the fancy of our 'sentimental bloodhound.'"

He beamed, as only a plump, rosy-faced old man can beam, at the distressed countenance which confronted him across the desk, for it was an old joke at the Prefecture that Rochecarbon, though unexcelled in the discovery of clues and their meanings, had often warranted this nickname by erring on the side of sentiment, preferring to reform rather than prosecute all but the most desperate criminals.

Rochecarbon tilted his hat farther back on his head and drummed moodily on the smooth surface of the desk before him.

"Chief, if you found every evidence of a murder except a victim, and clues so plain that they were obvious, what would you believe?"

Goudet ceased to smile and leaned forward expectantly, pushing aside the neatly arranged articles on his desk as if to clear a way for his answer.

"I would say there had been a murder, assuredly, and that Monsieur Rochecarbon

would quickly solve the mystery. Who was it?"

"Monsieur Beauté, my friend—and I might have prevented it had I been five minutes earlier."

Briefly, yet with a completeness that left out no important details, he recounted the events from his summons by Beauté to the visit and its subsequent revelations, including the letter, revolver and charred bits of paper.

"Those are the facts," he concluded. "Yet there is something suspiciously simple about them all. Leaving out but one detail, the hiding of the body, see how easily the clues reconstruct the scene. Beauté is at work in his studio. Jean hears a shot, or rather two shots, in rapid succession, and comes down after a frightened moment of hesitation. The murderer had evidently seized Beauté's own weapon for the deed; may even have snatched it from his hand and thus received a wound himself. Before Jean comes, he hides in the store-room and binds up his wound. Then he escapes into the street. The trail of blood, the torn sheet, Beauté's premonition in his letter to me—all is plain, too suspiciously plain, to believe."

"You treat the disappearance of the body lightly, Rochecarbon."

"It is a mystery now, of course, but such mysteries always prove simple in the end. The body must be in the house still, for where else could it be? A man cannot carry a dead body into the street and calmly walk away with it! A secret room or closet would explain that mystery. No, that does not worry me yet. But here is a murder with evidence of careful foresight, a knowledge of the house, all completed within a few minutes, and a self-evident solution in the clues left behind."

"What then of the painted heart and the burned papers?"

Rochecarbon silently shook his head and began to tap on the desk once more.

"Goudet, I am afraid it is all too clear, yet because it is so, and I am prejudiced, I hesitate to believe it. What are burned papers in connection with a murder? Invariably they are either incriminating or secret documents, or a will. In this case I believe it is the latter. Consider the facts, the knowledge the intruder possessed of the house, the painted heart, which was painted after the shot, as it was smeared into the cracks and upon the wall behind them, the burned will, the two sons at odds with their father."

"But still I do not understand. You think——"

"That one of the sons is guilty? Yes, I am forced to it."

"But even so, how could he escape as Jean says without your seeing him?"

Rochecarbon drew a rough map of the street and showed it to Monsieur Goudet.

"See, as I stood at the front gate the rear door was hidden by this ell in the wall. It was only by chance I saw Jean re-enter the yard, as I certainly did not see him come out from it a moment before. Also the street was empty, except for the drunken woman. The man she saw was Jean, of course, though she imagined him drunk like herself and probably saw double."

Goudet nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, a man might have easily escaped under those conditions. You are sure of this servant Jean?"

"Absolutely. He has been like a second father to them all. Besides, his fear and horror were too real. No, Jean might have murdered any one who attacked his master, but as to killing Beauté himself—impossible."

"One more question. What of the painted heart?"

"That is what makes the case all the more suspiciously clear to me. I recall dimly some family story or tradition about a murder and a heart. Beauté told it to me, but I cannot remember the details. Neville and Alphonse know it, of course, and will tell me, for they will be here shortly, I hope."

"You sent for them? Then you know——"

"Nothing. My request will not surprise them. Fortunately I know just about where to find them at this hour, and sent for them before I came here to you. Several times before I have called them to my office, at their father's request, to speak about cer-

tain private matters." Rochecarbon frowned as if the recollection of these interviews was far from agreeable. "It is sad, Goudet, when a father passionately loves his sons and seeks their good above all else, only to see their answering passion returned to him distorted into misunderstanding, reproach, even hateful greed."

"Tell me more about these sons."

"They are twins, but as unlike as strangers. Neville is several years the younger in appearance and temperament; thoughtless, gay, always boasting of his future accomplishments or bemoaning his present fate. His temper is unrestrained, blazing out at the least provocation. Alphonse is quiet, almost sullen, and too mature for his age; he speaks little, is always industrious, but never successful. The one lives by his wits; the other fails by his toil. They are together seldom, if ever, except when visiting their father once a month. Altogether they are to me about as unlovable a pair as could be imagined."

"These visits, when do they occur?"

"Always on the first Monday of every——" Rochecarbon started. "Why, they must have been there last night! That makes the case all the more damning!"

His exclamation was interrupted by the buzzing of a telephone and Goudet, after a brief word, passed the receiver to Rochecarbon.

"Yes? At once, in my office," the latter answered as he rose and beckoned to Goudet. "The brothers are here now. You can watch from the inner office without being seen."

A moment later two men entered the room into which Rochecarbon had hurried.

"Well, what have we done now? Is it my turn, or Alphonse's, or both, Father Disciplinarian?" Neville cheerfully asked, flinging his hat down on Rochecarbon's desk and smoothing his blond hair sleekly back over his well-shaped head. His eyes sparkled with good-natured amusement and his smile seemed to spread far up into his ruddy cheeks. Smartly cut and perfectly, his clothes proclaimed the youth of fashion, and a certain restraint about them only heightened his careless buoyancy. Alphonse, on the other hand, merely nodded slightly, perched on the low window-sill and waited for Rochecarbon to speak. He was somberly, almost shabbily, dressed in a worn suit which accentuated the pallor of his peaked face, and his shadowed eyes seemed steeled against sympathy or even friendliness. A cigarette sent quick, nervous puffs of smoke curling from his thin lips.

Abruptly Rochecarbon spoke:

"You visited your father as usual last night? And there was an argument about——" He paused suggestively.

"About me! You're right, as usual, Rochecarbon; there certainly was! Alphonse here got off lightly on the monthly tirade because he kept his mouth shut, while I—and Madelaine—got it all. But I managed to survive, as you can see, and——"

"Personal details aren't exactly any one's business but your own," cut in Alphonse coldly. "You wanted to see us about something, Monsieur Rochecarbon?"

Rochecarbon ignored the interruption and continued: "And what have you been doing today, Neville?"

"Slept till noon—for which I suppose you would have me hang my head in shame—dined at Madelaine's, came from there at your bidding, Father Confessor. Shall I tell you all we talked about, or might that not shock you too much?"

"I really did not come here to——" began Alphonse.

"Can you give as good account of yourself?" snapped Rochecarbon.

"I could, but I won't!" reported Alphonse, lighting a fresh cigarette with a hand which shook perceptably.

"You won't, eh?" shouted Rochecarbon, suddenly aroused by this cool statement. "I rather think you will, young man, to save your own skin. Your father was murdered at a little before two o'clock this afternoon. Now, where were you?"

All three men jumped to their feet. Neville turned white, then as quickly flushed scarlet, his eyes fixed on Rochecarbon's face; the latter glared at Alphonse, whose cigarette slipped from his lips and fell unnoticed to the floor. His face bore no outward signs of emotion, but a quick shudder

passed through his body. He stiffened and stood rigid for a moment till the smell of scorching carpet recalled him to the present and he ground out the lighted cigarette with his heel.

"Answer me, where were you?" reiterated Rochecarbon.

Alphonse steadily returned his gaze.

"My movements had nothing to do with this—this——" He looked away quickly. "I refuse to tell you what concerns no one but myself."

"But, Alphonse," cried Neville excitedly, "can't you see it's important? He stupidly suspects you of—of something, or some connection with father——" He gulped suddenly and hid his face in his hands, dreading to speak that one word.

"Once more I ask you, what were you doing today?"

"I refuse to answer."

At these words Neville raised his flushed face from his hands and looked straight at his brother.

"Yet you went back after we left and quarreled again with father! I saw you myself, and heard you shouting at each other. You don't mention that, I suppose, because it doesn't concern—— Oh, God, what am I saying? I did not mean that. I—I——"

"It is true," said Alphonse briefly. "I did return and the quarrel was all my fault. I regret it now, but it had no bearing on his—death."

The last word was spoken almost in a whisper. Rochecarbon was puzzled at his attitude, though scarcely surprised to find him stubborn at first, as that trait was no new phase of Alphonse's character. Briefly he sketched the story of his visit to the Rue Bref and its consequences, omitting certain details.

"And there was nothing more?" finally asked Neville. "No trace of the murderer or—or a body? Then how do you know there was a murder at all? Perhaps it was just some accident."

His voice regained some of its youthful hopefulness.

"One cannot be sure—yet. But the body will be found, of that I am certain. Tell me, there was some story your father used to tell about a murder and a heart, a family tradition or something like that. What was it?"

"'Le Cœur Percé,' you mean?" answered Neville. "Why, you asked that same question last night, Alphonse."

"What was the story?" muttered Rochecarbon.

"Oh, about some old ancestor of ours whose father forbade his marrying a certain woman, and, when his son persisted, shut her up in a convent or some place like that. Then the son killed his father with an arrow, painted a pierced heart on the wall above the body as a proof of his vengeance, and killed himself. But what made you think of that yarn just now?"

"One of the bullets fired in the studio is embedded in the mirror," answered Rochecarbon, shifting his gaze to Alphonse's face. "Around the edges of the hole it made is painted a red heart."

Alphonse gasped, turned an ashen gray and clutched the back of a chair to steady himself, but he did not speak.

"You have nothing further to say?" demanded Rochecarbon. "Then that is all. I shall see you both again—later."

With head bowed Alphonse stumbled across the room, grasped his brother's arm, and together they went out. As Monsieur Goudet stepped from the room where he had been concealed, his face grave and stern, Rochecarbon gave instructions over the telephone that both the men be carefully shadowed, then turned to him.

"Well?"

"It looks bad for Alphonse. And yet——"

"Just so. Yet there is the body, and why, if he murdered his father, the painted heart? Neville is in love, is quick-tempered, needs money, but the case fits Alphonse only in the latter point. Moreover, Beauté did not oppose Neville's match. I could not hold them on suspicion—yet—so let them go."

"Perhaps we shall know more when your men report later on," Goudet added.

In the meantime, the two brothers walked slowly away from the Prefecture. Neither spoke until they had gone several blocks;

then Alphonse suddenly dropped Neville's arm and resolutely squared his shoulders.

"Neville," he said in a hollow, unemotional voice, "we haven't been very good brothers—or sons. It's too late to think of the latter now."

"Yes, too late—too late now," muttered Neville.

"But perhaps we can make up for the other. I—well, let's try, though Death is a grim teacher for such a lesson. Neville, I don't know much about your affairs, nor you of mine. But I do know about—Madelaine. Tell me, is she—worthy?"

"She's wonderful, Alphonse," cried Neville, his face lighting up with enthusiasm for an instant. "But she's determined not to marry me until I settle down and earn a living. I've tried, but somehow I can't seem to do it. Life is so—so interesting to leave it all and just grind. I believe I could succeed with her help, if only I could get a start. Why wouldn't father give me money?"

He broke off shortly, as if realizing for the first time the full extent of the tragedy and its personal application.

"God knows I'd help you if I could," responded Alphonse. "But I am as badly off as you are—or worse."

"It isn't as if he did not have the money to give." A quick flush of anger mounted to Neville's cheeks. "And to his own son! Why, even Rochecarbon, the old fool, has treated us better than our own father!"

"I know. But father had other ideas. I. he had——"

"Go on; why not say it? It he had not been so miserly with his wealth, had not demanded an accounting for every sou we spent as if we were schoolboys; had only helped instead of throwing us upon the world to grovel for a living like beggars, while his money rotted——"

"Stop, Neville. It's easy to whine now, but think, have you ever really tried to stand on your own feet and make any sort of a man of yourself?"

"There you go, preaching just as he did! Why don't you speak for yourself in that respect?" blazed Neville. "Heaven knows you've nothing to boast about in the way of a success yourself," he added ironically.

Alphonse drew away sharply.

"Oh, yes, it's all very well for you to preach to me, Alphonse, but what do you know about ambition, love, money? Why, you go around looking like a living ragbag! Have you ever been in love, ever seen happiness slipping out of your very hands because you lacked a few measly francs? No! And what would you do if you were in such a position—stand up and say, 'No, thank you, father; keep your money and let me struggle on alone'? What have you ever done to hold yourself up as an example of virtue, answer me that?"

"Yes, what have I done?" echoed Alphonse wearily, turning on his heels and abruptly walking away from his thoroughly aroused brother.

"Money!" the latter muttered to himself. "I'd do anything in the world to get it! If I knew where he kept it. I wonder if he hid it there."

With a sudden resolve he, too, hurried away down the street.

CHAPTER TWO

ROCHECARBON threw down the report on the desk before Monsieur Goudet and angrily stamped over to the small wood stove which crackled cheerily in a corner of the office. It was eleven o'clock of the same evening, but an uncomfortable chill had crept up from the river on a blanket of mist, driving all hints of spring away before its penetrating onslaught and making a fire almost a necessity for reasonable comfort. To Rochecarbon, who had scarcely begun to realize the personal aspects of his friend's death until now, the cold brought a renewed energy and physical alertness which had been somewhat lacking to his routine professional duties earlier in the day, so that the slightest setback aroused him all the more to action and impatience.

Goudet glanced at the report, but made no comment.

"Of all the vital blunders!" broke forth Rochecarbon. "He lets Alphonse walk into a completely deserted house, making the excuse that he did not know it was vacant because it was dark. So he waits for Alphonse to reappear, while the latter simply walks through the house, out the back door, and disappears. What sort of a detective do you call that, eh?"

"Alphonse has not been seen since?"

"No, and not likely to be, either, although he will have a hard time escaping from that neighborhood now."

"Then there's nothing to do but wait till he is found again, Rochecarbon. Meantime, what of Neville?"

"That's another queer case. Why should he have gone at once to the Café Gris, and —what is it the report says—'talked earnestly with eight men, one after the other'? They are a bad lot, these men, not perhaps criminals, but bad, all of them. How does he know them, in the first place? And why confer with them so quickly after hearing of his father's death?"

"Is this the first you've known of his association with these men?"

"Yes. You've seen the brothers for yourself, and can appreciate why, although I have dealt with them before, it has been through a sense of duty to Beauté rather than a desire to know them better personally. To me they are insufferable idiots, nothing more, and such a relationship hardly breeds trust or familiarity."

Goudet nodded and thoughtfully twisted the waxed points of his mustache.

"Chief, I can't seem to get hold of anything definite to work on," Rochecarbon continued ruminatively. "No one saw the murderer clearly; Jean caught only a glimpse of a man, and the woman in the café—well, heaven knows what she did see! I've searched the surrounding streets and house, questioned every living being there, but without success. Yet here is a murderer who killed his victim, hides the body, and escapes, all in a few minutes and almost before my own eyes. If he was wounded, as the torn sheet clearly indicates, it surely was not Alphonse, yet every other suspicion points his way.

"I have verified my guess as to the charred papers, for there are the last two letters of Beauté's name in his characteristic handwriting on one of them and a blotch of sealing-wax on the other. There is the motive—a burned will. And who would profit by such an act? Presumably one of the brothers."

Rochecarbon picked up the unfinished letter from the desk.

" 'Stand between me and my beloved son. If I have misunderstood him and his threats or intentions, then I deserve the death.' What could be clearer proof of his fear than that, or of whom he referred to?"

His gaze wandered to the window and once again he seemed to see Alphonse sitting there, insolently denying to reveal simple facts or details; Neville unwittingly blurting out the fact of the quarrel between his father and brother; Alphonse, again, clutching wildly at a chair when told of the painted heart on the mirror. Was it guilty knowledge which prompted this? Was there more than coincidence in his having brought up the story of the "pierced heart" that previous evening? Rochecarbon struggled to think clearly, lest his personal prejudices cloud his professional judgment.

"To me," at length said Goudet, "the circumstantial evidence appears plainly incriminating against Alphonse. Yet there is nothing to be done but watch and wait for further developments or the finding of the body. Guilbert has searched the house—and you know as well as I what a thorough search that would be—still no hiding-place or body has been discovered. What more can we do?"

"Something is back of it all—something we have not grasped at all because it is too simple and obvious," said Rochecarbon with conviction. "I feel it is there, but cannot name it. I don't know what to think of it all or what to believe."

"Then do neither until suspicion becomes fact. Well, there's nothing to be gained tonight, so I'm off to bed. Coming?"

"Not just yet. Good-night!"

Left alone, Rochecarbon sat down at the desk and began to jab viciously at the blotter with a paper-cutter—a slender stiletto

which had been appropriated as a souvenir of a vengeful criminal's attempt on Goudet's life. Over and over he pondered each detail of the murder and the suspicious conversation with the two brothers, but without further enlightenment. Finally he sighed despairingly, switched off the light and was about to leave the room when the telephone rang. As he listened to the startled voice over the wire, he became tense and alert, his eyes narrowing, his brows wrinkling in astonishment.

"Touch nothing. Remain in the hall and I will come immediately," he answered, and hurried away.

Fifteen minutes later he confronted an excited gendarme and Jean, trembling as if with an ague, in the hall of the house in the Rue Bref.

"Tell me exactly what happened, Jean," he commanded. "Come now, pull yourself together. Every moment is valuable."

"I had closed the house for the night," Jean faltered, breathing in quick gasps. "The—the other officer was outside. I heard a noise——"

"What sort of a noise?"

"As if—as if some one had overturned a chair. I seized my revolver, crept down the stairs and into the studio. Turning on the light quickly, I saw a man, his back toward me, listening."

"You did not see his face?"

"In the mirror only, but a cap was pulled almost over his eyes and some dark scarf hid the rest of his face."

Jean staggered and leaned against the wall, clutching at his throat nervously and glancing about him like a haunted man.

"The eyes—the eyes——" he moaned, then suddenly recovered himself with an effort.

"What was his height and general appearance?"

"Somewhat like yours, only more slender, I think. But let me tell you the rest. I fired and he fell. Oh, it was horrible, Monsieur. I did not mean to kill him." His voice rose to a shrill, crackling falsetto. "I shouted; I ran into the street and called this—this man. We hurried back into the studio. The light was still burning, but the room was empty—the body gone!"

Rochecarbon turned to the gendarme.

"Why were you outside?"

"I had just arrived to relieve the other, Monsieur. He gave me instructions there. I met this man just as he ran out."

"You have seen no one here since?"

"No, Monsieur. I telephoned you immediately after searching the house and yard while this man was in the hall, but I found no one."

"How was the man dressed, Jean?"

"A dark suit, that is all I remember."

Rochecarbon entered the studio, but nothing was out of place except an easel which had been overturned and probably explained the noise Jean had heard.

"Where was he standing when you fired?"

"By the fireplace. He spun around as he fell so that his head pointed toward me, and his eyes stared. Oh, it was horrible!"

"And where were you standing?"

"About here." He placed himself a few steps inside the threshold of the room.

Standing on the spot Jean had indicated, Rochecarbon closely examined the hearthrug at his feet. There were a few stains of blood which appeared fresher than the others, but nothing to indicate any serious loss of blood. A scrutiny of the fireplace disclosed the probable explanation; a bullet lay in the ashes, flattened out against the brick wall, having done little or no injury to the intruder. His escape, then, had been merely a trick. But Rochecarbon concealed the bullet in his hand and dropped it into his pocket without comment.

"Well, whoever it was, he's gone by now. Better make sure your man is dead next time, Jean."

"Then you think—you think I did not kill him?" stammered Jean. "Thank God!"

"Thank the devil, you mean! There are only two explanations possible: either he was wounded and escaped, or killed and taken away by a confederate. Take your choice as to which actually happened. You, Jean, better take a stiff drink and get to bed at once. You acted for the best at any rate. Officer, remain on guard, and don't

leave the house under any circumstances." With a kindly nod to Jean, Rochecarbon stepped into the rear yard and quickly noted that the outer gate was ajar. Not waiting to push it open, he squeezed through into the street and hesitated, listening for a moment. The street light feebly struggled to pierce the gloomy silence, but only succeeded in making the dark shadows all the more pronounced and grotesque in their angular irregularity. The damp cold pricked like a thousand invisible needles, and Rochecarbon drew his coat still tighter about his shoulders, thrusting one hand under its thinly protecting folds.

Suddenly, before his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, a hand clutched his arm and a voice whispered excitedly at his side: "So you got it all right? Let me have it. I waited, but when you did not come, I thought something might have gone wrong and came here."

Rochecarbon quickly grasped his unknown inquirer by the arm, then chuckled softly.

"No, nothing's wrong since you are here! Come along, none of that!" He tightened his grip as the other began to struggle and writhe himself free. "In you go!"

Half shoving, half pulling, Rochecarbon piloted his captive through the gate just as another figure sprang from the mist to his assistance.

"Why, you, Jacques? What brings you here? Oh, I can manage this one alone, all right. He's a weak one."

"I followed him here, sir," answered Jacques.

"But you were to shadow Neville!" muttered Rochecarbon as they entered the hall, and jerked the cringing man against the wall.

"Now then, who are you, and what—Neville!" he finished with a gasp of astonishment as he pulled off the hat of the man facing him.

"How did you guess it?" answered Neville, attempting a smile and bravado which was far from sincere or in keeping with the frightened pallor which blanched his cheeks. "So we—we meet again, eh, Rochecarbon?"

"The pleasure is all mine!" retorted the latter ironically. "Well, who was the man you expected, and what was he to get?"

"If you'll take your hand off my throat—ah!" Neville rubbed his throat nervously and stared at Rochecarbon. "I've been a fool again—always seem to be, for that matter."

He swallowed with an effort to wet his lips.

"It was a—a friend of mine, and he was after—money!"

"Better tell me the whole story," said Rochecarbon skeptically.

"Oh, I'm going to, but it's simple enough. After Alphonse and I felt your office, we quarreled. He started to preach to me and I told him what I thought of him as a minister of the gospel of good advice." His voice changed abruptly to a pleading tone. "Rochecarbon, you've helped me before, though Heaven knows why, now believe me when I tell you the whole truth. I need money badly. I'd begged father for it, but he only taunted me to go earn it for myself. It's been like a curse on me day and night; like a—a craving, until—well, after Alphonse left me I got to thinking of all the money father had probably hidden away here. Suddenly I remembered a secret panel in the mantel which I had discovered years ago and forgotten. I thought the money might be there, and some of it was mine, anyway, so I went to a—a man——"

"In the Café Gris this evening?"

"Yes, but how did you know?" answered Neville in surprise.

"You were followed. But go on."

"Followed? But why?"

"Who was the man?"

"His name doesn't matter; besides, I've sworn not to reveal it under any circumstances. He agreed to look for the money, but when the appointed time for his return arrived and passed, I came here to see if anything had gone wrong. That is all, I swear it."

"Why didn't you do the searching yourself?"

"I—I couldn't, after—after father's death," stammered Neville, looking away.

"Oh, I see. Afraid to do such a deed

yourself!" sneered Rochecarbon. "You'd rather some one else ran the risk for you!"

"There was no risk. We had it all planned to——"

"No risk? I suppose death is no risk? Jean shot your man."

"Not—not dead?"

Rochecarbon shrugged, and Neville, interpreting his silence as assent, began to sway back and forth as if he had been struck a blow; then his knees gave way and he slipped helplessly to the floor, his back propped against the wall. After watching him without pity for a moment, Rochecarbon clutched him by the shoulder and shook him sternly.

"Where was this secret panel?"

Neville's eyes were filmed with a sort of blank bewilderment, but he answered mechanically: "The panel—left side of the fireplace," then dropped back limply.

Leaving Jacques on guard, Rochecarbon went into the studio and began to run his fingers inquisitively over the heavily carved panel Neville had indicated, pressing on each outstanding flower petal, twisting and pushing every leaf and stem to discover a hidden catch or spring. At last a tiny flower bud sprang away from his touch and a small door swung open, revealing a square cupboard which contained an ordinary tin box, its cover closed but unlocked. A glance within it showed a neatly bound sheaf of banknotes in large denominations and a folded paper which proved to be a will, dated five years ago, leaving all Beauté's possessions to Alphonse!

Without closer scrutiny Rochecarbon replaced these articles in the box, concealed it under his coat, then again confronted Neville.

"In the eyes of the law you are an accessory to breaking and entering with the intent to steal. Until it can be proved there is no worse crime, or——"

Abruptly he stopped, perceiving his words fell on unheeding ears.

"Take him away, Jacques. This other guard will help you. I will stay here until he returns."

Jacques nodded and jerked Neville roughly to his feet. The latter staggered uncertainly, looked vaguely at each of the men for a moment, then seemed to recover his senses.

"I guess—I'll go back—to Madelaine," he muttered.

Jacques pulled him a few steps along the hall.

"Here, where are you—you taking me?"

"Come along; jail's the place for you."

"Rochecarbon, what does this mean? Help me!" cried Neville, fighting to break away. "What have I done? I did not mean any—any harm. The money was mine, I tell you. Besides, I did not get it. I only——"

"Only hired a man to steal for you—only placed his life in danger to save your own skin? It's rather late to think of these things now," Rochecarbon sneered.

"But you—you will help me? You will tell Alphonse——"

"Ah, now that you are in trouble you call for the brother you despise!"

Neville hung his head in shame.

"But Madelaine—I left her alone in the Café de Ville. You—you won't tell her? She knows I came here."

"She must be told sooner or later," answered Rochecarbon brusquely, turning on his heel and re-entering the studio as Jacques and the guard hurried their protesting prisoner away.

Wearily Rochecarbon dropped into a chair and faced the broken mirror with a puzzled frown, while he went over the details of Neville's confession again. He had sounded sincere in his frightened outburst, but his story needed a thorough checking up before Rochecarbon would believe it. And the will—that was another complication. At first thought it seemed evident that Alphonse must have known of its existence, perhaps destroyed some later one which left an inheritance to Neville. Yet this story of Neville's greed for money—might not he have meant to destroy the will just recovered, and was using the money as a blind to hide his real purpose? Of course the second intruder must be found, yet even then, how much credence could be put in what he would tell?

A nervous impatience interrupted his

thoughts and Rochecarbon began to pace the studio silently, stopping now and then to gaze at the blank wall as if waiting for it to speak and reveal the scene it had witnessed. Nearing the door in his restless agitation, he peered into the hall just as Jean, in bathrobe and slippers, stopped half-way down the stairs and clutched at the banister wildly.

"What is it?" exclaimed Rochecarbon, running forward to support him.

"The eyes—they will not let me sleep!" whispered Jean hoarsely. His colorless face stood out ghost-like in the semi-darkness.

"Come, this won't do," soothed Rochecarbon, leading him back up the stairs. "After all, you probably didn't kill him."

"Didn't kill—him?" Jean cried excitedly. "But I saw him dead! I——"

"Now just forget all that. Here"—Rochecarbon opened a medicine cabinet which stood in the hall and drew out a box marked sleeping powders—"take one of these and go back to bed."

Like a child Jean obeyed and shortly afterward Rochecarbon left him in a drugged sleep. As he regained the first floor the front doorbell sounded faintly.

"That's the guard again at last. Probably the latch was sprung," muttered Rochecarbon as he hastened out and swung open the small door which was set into the larger one of the gate. But it proved to be a young woman who was waiting there and who met his astonished gaze calmly.

"I saw a light and supposed it was all right to ring. Is Monsieur Neville Beauté here?"

Her voice was low and steady, but her manner subtly suggested an uncertainty or agitation which she strove to repress.

"He left a few minutes ago," answered Rochecarbon almost before he realized he had spoken.

"Oh, then he was all right!" She sounded relieved. "Can you please tell me where he went?"

Rochecarbon started to reply evasively, for there was something frank and friendly about this slender, quietly dressed woman which impressed him strangely, but he steeled himself against this sentimentality and watched her keenly as he answered: "He went to jail."

Every trace of buoyancy and color left her face in an instant, except for her eyes, which widened and flashed startlingly; she faltered and fumbled at the side of the gate for support, so that Rochecarbon's hand flew out to steady her.

"Who are you?" he added quickly.

"M-Madelaine Fourmant."

"Ah, come in, and I will tell you." She hesitated, and he added: "I am Rochecarbon."

"Then—then I know of you, Monsieur."

As he led her into the hall the color slowly crept back into her face and she ceased to tremble.

"You told me—the truth?" Madelaine pleadingly faced him.

"Yes. But why are you here?"

"He left me at the Café de Ville, saying he was coming here for a moment. He acted queerly, and would not tell me why. When he did not come back, I came here to see—to see——"

"What?"

"I don't know." She paused in evident confusion. "But what has he done?"

Rochecarbon hesitated, then told her what had occurred, omitting mention of the bullet and the finding of the will.

"That is what Neville says; it remains to be seen what we shall see," he finished lamely. "The man he hired may tell us something."

"Then Neville told you his name?"

"No. He was in no condition to do so tonight. We know he made the bargain at the Café Gris, however."

"Oh, then perhaps I know who it is. He spoke of a man. Will it help to clear Neville when you find this man?"

"Yes; that is, perhaps."

"Then I shall find him for you."

"You? How?"

"I shall find him tonight!" reiterated Madelaine, and her tone almost compelled belief.

"God help you," muttered Rochecarbon ambiguously as she turned to go.

"Monsieur," she suddenly confronted him again, pleading with voice and eyes,

"believe me, there is no evil in Neville. He is quick, rash sometimes, thoughtless often, but not bad. You have helped him before, that I know. Help him—help us, now. I never met his father, yet he misjudged me, swearing I was only after money because I refused to marry Neville until he had five thousand francs. But it was because I knew Monsieur Beauté would not give him money that I did this—it was to make Neville earn it for himself, don't you see? Jean was our friend and tried to make Monsieur Beauté understand the truth, but that only made matters worse."

Her eyes misted with earnest tears as she laid her hand on his arm in her eagerness to convince him.

"Don't you understand? Neville was after the money for me, thinking I would accept that. Oh, Monsieur, you do understand? You will help?"

Rochecarbon nodded slowly.

"Then I will find that man. I will succeed!"

She hurried quickly away, leaving Rochecarbon strangely stirred, perhaps because she was so different from the frivolous, thoughtless child he had pictured her to be, for here was a woman, self-reliant, earnest, far-sighted—one who faced facts without quibbling. But no sooner had she gone than his doubts returned. He shrugged, and tried to throw off the spell of her presence. He had been credulous before—"sentimental bloodhound," eh?—and this time he would not be so easily deceived by her story, unless facts could be produced to substantiate it. So, struggling to confine himself to proven facts only, he once more sat down to await the coming of the guard.

But the echo of her determined "I will succeed" still persisted in his ears when he entered the office on the following morning to find Alphonse already impatiently awaiting him. With a curt nod, Rochecarbon busied himself with some papers and answered a telephone call before he spoke, meanwhile covertly watching Alphonse.

"You think I am going to put you through a third degree, I suppose?" he said.

"It would be useless if you did," answered Alphone in a level tone.

His words were curt, though his expression was somehow less stern and unrelenting than usual. The hard lines about his mouth were still in evidence, yet they seemed intangibly softened, and his perpetual frown suggested worry and privation rather than a sullen temper. His whole manner was less nervous, though scarcely less unfriendly.

"Perhaps it would," continued Rochecarbon. "But instead of seeking information, I am giving it. Last night your father's will was found. It leaves everything to you."

Alphonse stared uncomprehendingly at Rochecarbon for an instant, then a strange expression twisted across his countenance, a mixture of relief and pain so intermingled that neither predominated. The tense lines about his mouth relaxed as if about to curve into a smile, but they drooped instead into misery; his eyes shone clear and wide, then narrowed and half closed; his hands clutched at the edge of the desk.

"Is that a trap or a joke?" he cried hoarsely. "You mean——"

"Exactly what I said."

"Thank God! If you only knew——"

Alphonse staggered weakly to a chair, into which he almost collapsed, but he said nothing more.

"That is one piece of news; the other is at your brother's request. He is in jail."

All the relief vanished from Alphonse's face, which became hard and mask-like again; he sprang to his feet, leaning toward Rochecarbon menacingly.

"You lie! My brother has done nothing to deserve that."

"Unfortunately, he has! He hired a man to steal your dead father's money for him. Jean shot the man, but, dead or alive, he escaped. Neville has confessed to it all, but nothing more—as yet."

"It's a lie, I tell you! And what do you mean to insinuate by that 'as yet'?"

"A man who does such a cowardly thing as that might have done worse, even mur——"

"Stop! Say that word and I swear I'll kill you!"

Rochecarbon returned his threatening look steadily.

"Ask him yourself, then."

He pressed a bell on his desk and Alphonse sank back into the chair, glaring fixedly at Rochecarbon until the door opened and Neville and Jean entered the room.

"Neville!" Alphonse sprang toward him. "It isn't true? You didn't do what—what he says?"

"If it's trying to get father's money you mean—yes, I did."

Alphonse grasped him by the shoulder so tightly that Neville winced and shrank back.

"Don't look at me that way, Alphonse. I didn't mean any harm. I had to have the money. I was desperate, I tell you." His voice was almost a whine, and Alphonse, with a look of uncontrolled horror, dropped his hands and drew back a step.

"So that is your opinion of Madelaine! As if any decent woman would take you on such terms! You'd stoop to that just to gratify a woman who——"

"Stop! Leave Madelaine's name out of this. It was for other things——"

"And to buy her off!"

"I tell you to leave her name——"

"After you told me just why you needed the money? I suppose five thousand francs was all she wanted—eh?"

"I tell you the money was for something else. I had a chance to go into business. Besides, it was mine, anyway."

The two brothers glared angrily at each other, unmindful of the other occupants of the room. Rochecarbon watched them steadily and impartially; Jean, his eyes fixed on Neville's flushed face, with incredulity.

"You know father would have left me a share of it when—when he died," continued Neville.

"So robbing the dead and putting another man's life in danger to do it was all perfectly justified," sneered his brother.

"Oh, yes, go on with your preaching! Call me a fool; tell me how simple everything is, how you would act in my place, you who know so much about struggling."

"Listen to me," interrupted Alphonse with sudden, ominous calm. "You've thrown that up to me for the last time. Now listen to the truth, all of it! We've both been selfish, critical, unjust to father. In his wisdom he denied us the money we would have wasted foolishly, and instead insisted that we make men of ourselves. Oh, yes, I see things differently now. And what have you done? Whined, complained, whimpered about love, passions, wrongs. You accuse me of preaching what I've never practised, while you posed as the injured one. What have I done? I'll tell you."

He faced his brother squarely, his eyes flaming, his shoulders thrown back and his face white as marble.

"I've been no saint, I grant you. I've whined and kicked, too, but with some reason. Neville, three years ago I fell in love with a woman who saw through my character and weaknesses and challenged me to make a man of myself before I came to her. I tried. God knows I tried—and failed. Everything went against me as if there were a curse upon my life. Then, when all seemed at its worst, she came to me. A year ago were were married.

"For a while I succeeded with her courageous help, then came failure again. Two nights ago, after we left father, I returned to tell him everything and plead for help. I was proud, stubborn, angry, and it was hard to begin. I asked for money first, saying only that I was in trouble. He misunderstood, refused to give it to me, and we quarreled. Then I could not tell him the truth."

"Alphonse, why didn't you tell me this."

"Wait, that isn't all."

He crossed the room to the window, where he looked out into the cloudless sky in silence, then folded his arms on the sash and bent his head upon them.

"You don't understand yet, Neville," he said thickly. "Father evidently relented after I left. He left me everything in his will, and now he's dead. God knows, I need the money, or part of it. I haven't a sou in the world. I've tramped the streets

for work in vain, and last night Alphonse Beauté, Junior, was born."

It was Neville who finally broke the silence.

"Heaven help the man I am going to work for. He's never met a man who'll work as hard as I shall!"

The words were spoken haltingly, but Alphonse understood what they were meant to convey, and straightened up to grasp him by the hand.

"I'll help you, Neville. I only want a little of the money for—for them, and the rest is yours, if you want it."

"No, Alphonse, I'm not such a fool any more. Don't worry about my taking one sou of it."

Involuntarily Rochecarbon smiled at this sudden pledge, but quickly he became serious again.

"Pride and misunderstanding, what devilish children of man they are!" he said. "If you had only told your father the truth long ago!"

"I know, but I wanted to make good first," answered Alphonse sadly.

"Where do you live now? Where is your wife—and son?"

Alphonse swallowed several times before he spoke, then answered simply: "A friend let us stay in a little shed in his yard near the Rue Sec. It has been a roof over our heads at least, one I could not have otherwise afforded. Other friends are with her now."

So that explained his disappearance the previous day, thought Rochecarbon.

"As soon as she can be moved bring her to my home." He spoke impulsively. "No, don't interrupt. That is an order. Remember, you are still under surveillance until various matters are explained. Go at once. My man will accompany you."

Rochecarbon fairly pushed him from the room. At the door he received and read a note which was handed him before he reentered the room. Neville sat with his chin in his hands, like a man who suddenly sees clearly and tries to think straight for the first time; Jean walked nervously about the room, greatly agitated by what he had heard, and perceptibly aged by the events of the last day; but every time his eyes rested on Neville a look of almost fatherly tenderness crept into them.

"Neville," said Rochecarbon gravely, "we've both been deceived in your brother. Real life is rooted deep below the surface, and we sometimes judge the roots to be rotten because the fruit looks ugly or small. We've learned a lot just now, but remember, the solution of your father's death only seems the more complicated. In view of what has happened, you have nothing more to tell me?"

"As God is my judge, nothing."

Jean abruptly ceased his pacing and, with a determination evidently produced by a fierce struggle, confronted Rochecarbon earnestly.

"Monsieur, I must speak to you alone for a moment."

Rochecarbon nodded agreement as Neville continued:

"Now I understand Alphonse's strange expression when he asked father to repeat the story of 'Le Cœur Percé.' Now I understand so many things my selfishness has brought about."

"There is one thing further you must know, too, Neville. Madelaine has heard all."

"Madelaine—knows?" It was a cry of anguish. "Then she knows I—I am here?"

"Yes."

"Then—then all is over," Neville muttered disconsolately.

"Are you so sure? Well, we shall see. Now I must get to work again. You will have to remain temporarily, at least."

After Neville had been escorted away Rochecarbon turned thoughtfully to Jean.

"It has been a morning of strange revelations, Jean. I had summoned you here to tell your story of the second intruder, but it was unnecessary, after all. You have something to tell me?"

Jean nodded slowly; his eyes restlessly jumped from one object in the room to another, his hands plucked nervously at a loose button on his vest.

"It—it is difficult, Monsieur," he faltered.

"Then get it over with at once," encouraged Rochecarbon.

"You do not suspect Neville—now?"

"He's not clear of suspicion yet, if that's what you mean."

"Monsieur, he is innocent of wrong," burst out Jean, his voice trembling with emotion. "The money—it was an indiscrete act, but he is so young, so full of himself and his own affairs that he did not think—did not understand what he was doing. I know him. I have watched him, helped him, and I know he did not do this—this thing to his father."

He paused, out of breath with the very vehemence of his emotion.

"Is this what you had to tell me, Jean?"

"No, not that. Monsieur, I—I heard Monsieur Alphonse quarrel with his father that night. It was because Monsieur Beauté threatened to destroy the will which left all to him."

"What's that you say?"

"He, that is, Monsieur Beauté, was angry. He swore to cut off Alphonse entirely. Then Alphonse, he——"

"Go on!"

"Alphonse threatened to kill him! Oh, I did not mean to tell this, until—until Neville was suspected."

A rapid fire of questions ensued, but when Jean left the office Rochecarbon's face was grim. Seizing the note which had been given him, he read it again slowly.

MONSIEUR ROCHECARBON: I have found the man with a bullet wound in the leg. I cannot tell you his name, for that he made me promise not to do. But all Neville said was true. There was nothing more, believe me, Monsieur.

MADELAINE FOURMANT.

"And five minutes ago I believed them all—and this, too," muttered Rochecarbon, as he tore the paper into bits. "Sensational Bloodhound? Bah, they're right! Once again I trusted too quickly."

The day had been a disappointing one for Rochecarbon. In spite of his almost feverish energy and tireless search, nothing new had developed; Neville and Madelaine had utterly refused to disclose the identity of the intruder, Alphonse had remained quietly watching over his wife and son, and no further traces of Monsieur Beauté's body had been found. To be sure, Alphonse had admitted the quarrel and threat which Jean had overheard, but he earnestly denied further knowledge of his father's death. Meanwhile the case against Neville was rapidly assuming a mere technical charge of accessory.

Such a deadlock was discouraging to Rochecarbon, for his work had previously been characterized by swift action, logical deductions and quick apprehension of the criminal. But now even the added slur of a personal interest in the solution of the mystery had produced little actual knowledge and no tangible suspicions. Nothing was clear in his mind except the conviction that the motive for the murder was involved in a will, and that the assassin was one familiar with the house, the family history and probably the existence and actual contents of the will itself.

As he sat in the studio brooding over these ideas late that afternoon, even these suspicions seemed clouded with doubt. After all, he thought, the reasoning was all wrong, for the murder had not been proved yet. Could it be that there had been no murder at all? Impossible! The clues were too obviously evidences of haste to have been prepared as a blind. Besides, Beauté, as Rochecarbon well knew, was not the sort of man to lend himself to any such an idea or disappearance which would throw suspicion on an innocent person.

Rochecarbon stirred restlessly in his chair and called to Jean, who was aimlessly moving about the room.

"Jean, you realize what your accusations against Alphonse point to?"

"Monsieur, it is—horrible, but it is the truth. I would not have told, only——"

"Yes, it is the truth, and of course you should have told me."

His mind jumped back to the matter of the will again.

"Did Monsieur Beauté ever make more than one will?"

"But I thought I had told you that, Monsieur! Four, five years ago he made two identical ones, the first leaving all to Ne-

ville, the other to Alphonse. These he kept together, intending to destroy the one or the other."

"Did he ever do this?"

"The—the morning of his death he told me but one remained."

"And that one?"

"In favor of Neville."

"You are sure?"

"He told me himself. How could I forget after hearing what he said to Alphonse?"

"Of course. But how do you account for the will I found?"

"It must have been some other, a later one, perhaps."

"But it was dated five years ago!"

Jean started to speak, but checked himself; he seemed strangely disturbed at this bit of information which he heard for the first time.

"Then there is only one explanation," continued Rochecarbon. "Either Beauté or some one else—the murderer, let us say —destroyed the wrong one!"

The thought horrified Jean.

"But, Monsieur, he meant the money for Neville; I swear it."

"The will we found stands, however. In the eyes of the courts his intentions can only be proved by his acts. No, everything goes to Alphonse, irrevocably."

"It is horrible—horrible, Monsieur!" gasped Jean, overcome by what seemed to him blind justice.

Rochecarbon crossed the room and intently studied the painted heart on the mirror.

"Jean, you have heard the story of the pierced heart?"

The latter shuddered and nodded.

"It happened many years ago, I believe. Has it ever recurred in the family until now?"

"Never!"

"You know nothing of Alphonse's marriage?"

"Nothing. He never spoke of himself. He was always the silent one."

"You believe Monsieur Beauté did not know, either?"

"I am sure of it. He knew of Mademoiselle Madelaine, he misunderstood her, but he did not exactly oppose Neville in that respect."

Rochecarbon balanced his hat on his finger and studied it absently as he twirled it about. A spot half concealed by the neat fold in the crown caught his attention and he attempted to brush it away.

"Didn't that seem strange to you?"

"No, Monsieur, for he knew of the condition she imposed on Neville before she would marry him."

The spot refused to come off and Rochecarbon examined it more closely. Suddenly he gave an excited exclamation, for the spot which stood out so boldly against the light gray felt was a dried blood-stain, and the hat was the one he had worn the day of the murder! Unconsciously his eyes searched the ceiling of the studio, but its dusty surface was unstained. His thoughts quickly sped back over the events of that day.

"Fool!" he shouted abruptly. "Jean, get a candle, quick!"

Startled by this sudden command, Jean hurried into the store-room and returned with a half-burned candle, which Rochecarbon seized from his hand, then, with a brief "Follow me," he hastened out through the rear yard to the mouth of the tunnel.

"Now light it!"

Jean's hands trembled so violently that Rochecarbon struck the match himself. The candle wick sputtered uncertainly, lighted and flickered in the slight breeze as Rochecarbon peered impatiently into the tunnel. As its floor sloped gradually up to the middle point in the passage, then down again to the other end, the center was a mere black spot against which the rounded silhouette of sunlight in the court beyond shone dazzlingly. His eyes eagerly searched the low roof of the tunnel, but from where he stood it was an unbroken shadow.

Shielding the flame with his hand, he walked swiftly to the highest point in the passage, then held the candle over his head and gazed upward.

A gruesome sight met his eye. Embedded in the stone work were two iron

bars about a meter apart. These had formerly served as a bracket from which to suspend a lantern or light, but now they held the rigid body of a man, his head enveloped in a stained cloth.

At the first sight of this terrifying object Jean collapsed weakly against the wall, but Rochecarbon steadily set down the candle on the ground and prepared to take down the body.

"Help me, Jean," he commanded. But Jean did not answer; he had fainted.

Alone Rochecarbon slid the corpse from the braces and laid it almost at Jean's feet. Stepping into the street again, he called the guard, who helped him carry it into the house, then returned for Jean, leaving the candle uselessly dancing in the empty darkness.

As soon as Jean showed signs of returning consciousness Rochecarbon carefully unwrapped the bloody sheet and confirmed his suspicions; the body of Monsieur Beauté had been found and the fact of murder established.

Next day the sun redoubled its efforts to call back the shy spring and the cloudless sky seemed so close to the earth that it rested on the twin spires of the cathedral. It was as if the finding of Monsieur Beauté's body had lifted a cloud from the Rue Bref, so that the dull houses lost some of their squalor and edged their façades with little streamers of golden light. Yet to Rochecarbon the street appeared more gloomy than ever as he swiftly entered the yard of Beauté's house, the last of a small group of people who had gathered there at his command.

Silently he nodded to Monsieur Goudet and another man standing apart from the others, then opened the door of the house.

"Will you all please enter?"

It was more of a command than a question, and, as they silently obeyed, Rochecarbon stood aside on the steps to let them pass. Madelaine recoiled with a half-audible gasp, but a word from Neville, together with the pressure of his hand in hers, and she bravely entered the hall.

"Is this really necessary?" Alphonse asked, but his tone was low, and a quick glance at Madelaine explained his reason for asking. At a nod from Rochecarbon, however, he, too, entered, and followed the others into the studio.

Rochecarbon started to roll up one of the tightly drawn curtains, but it flew out of his hand with a startling rumble, letting in a flood of sunlight which made the stains on the floor stand out in bold relief. Quickly he lowered it part way, glanced about the room, and faced the expectant group.

"Monsieur Goudet, Alphonse and Neville you have—er—seen before. This is Madelaine Fourmant. Monsieur Benal is the coroner."

They bowed courteously. Stepping into the hall, Rochecarbon called Jean, who came slowly down the stairs, an ashen old man, faltering so that he had to be assisted into the room. But not until they were all seated and silent did Rochecarbon speak again.

"Perhaps you are wondering why I have brought you all together here in the very room where my friend was murdered. I will tell you. It was to reconstruct before your eyes the scene of his death and to show you the truth!"

He spoke confidently, masking any uncertainty which he himself felt at this simple experiment, for it was a test which might confirm his rapidly growing suspicions—or fail completely.

"Before we begin, however, you must know that the body of Monsieur Beauté has been found. He was brutally shot through the head and his body concealed in the darkness of the tunnel, where it has remained on the two iron braces in the roof ever since the day of the murder."

All eyes were fixed intently on Rochecarbon's face, and there was no sound except a faint movement of horror and an almost inaudible groan from Jean.

"As I go over the details which preceded his death and describe the actual scene of his murder," continued Rochecarbon, "I want you to follow me closely, correct me in any statement that is false or inexact, so that we may see the whole sad story clearly.

"The night before the murder Alphonse and Neville met here, as was their custom,

to visit their father. This was an important prelude to the subsequent events. During the ensuing conversation a bittle discussion took place. Am I right?"

Alphonse and Neville nodded, and the former half arose to interrupt, but at a sign from Rochecarbon he sank back again.

"The attitude of each is clear; Alphonse and Neville desired the money at once; Monsieur Beauté demanded an evidence of their worthiness to have it. It is not necessary to go into all the details of this—misunderstanding, shall we call it—other than to ask one question: Were there any threats or open accusations made by any one?"

"Accusations, yes; but no threats," muttered Neville contritely.

"Parting in anger, the sons left, but Alphonse returned to plead once more with his father for the reason we have subsequently heard—his wife and expected child."

Rochecarbon addressed these words of explanation to Madelaine, whose eyes misted with quick understanding.

"But pride and stubbornness prevented his revealing the truth, and Monsieur Beauté swore to disinherit him entirely. Alphonse in anger threatened his father's life, then abruptly left the house. This is all admitted by him and corroborated by Jean's statement, for he overheard the quarrel, and finally by Neville, who happened to see him return."

"Not 'happened,'" interrupted Neville. "I followed him back to—to try and learn more about the money. I could not hear, so I left at once." He looked away as he spoke, afraid to meet Rochecarbon's level gaze.

"The next day Beauté began a letter to me, but changed his mind in the middle of it and summoned me by telephone instead, asking me to be here at two o'clock," Rochecarbon continued. "As he waited for my coming his thoughts returned to the conversation with Alphonse, and I believe he suddenly discovered his own mistake, understood a part of what his son had vainly tried to tell him. Perhaps it was in connection with the story of the painted heart which he had told at Alphonse's request."

"Then you think he knew?" cried Alphonse. "How? Why?"

"It is only a surmise on my part, but in the light of all the evidence it seems probable to me. But to continue: Going to the secret panel, Monsieur Beauté took out the will in favor of Neville. There were two identical wills, one in favor of each son. These had been made some years previously and witnessed by Jean."

At the mention of his name Jean leaned forward restlessly in his chair and Rochecarbon turned to face him. Jean's eyes were strangely bright, and he watched Rochecarbon with an almost hypnotic stare.

"But before reading over the will Monsieur Beauté called you, Jean, ordering you to admit no one but myself. Then he sat down at his desk, perhaps thinking of his sons' lives and their unfriendly attitude toward him. While he was thus pondering a man entered the room."

Rochecarbon paused dramatically, his eyes fixed steadily on Jean's twitching face.

"This man crept stealthily over to the window and hid himself behind its draperies. Monsieur Beauté, unconscious of his presence, continued his contemplations for a time, then arose and crossed to the fireplace. The intruder slipped out from his hiding-place, went to the desk Beauté had just left, and seized the revolver which was always kept there loaded.

"At the fireplace Monsieur Beauté happened to glance in the mirror and saw the man for the first time. Without turning, he watched in the glass until their eyes met. Slowly the intruder raised his borrowed weapon until it pointed straight at Beauté's head, but still neither spoke. Then suddenly the man commanded Beauté to burn the will in his hand. The latter refused, and a shot rang out, followed by the splintering of glass, for it had missed Beauté and hit his image in the mirror."

Jean's eyes widened in terror and his breath came in explosive gasps.

"The man might have fired again at once, but he waited as a look of surprised horror

spread over Beauté's face, for he knew the man!"

"His eyes—his eyes—they burned!" muttered Jean.

"Then Beauté whirled about to face *you*, Jean," continued Rochecarbon confidently switching to the second person without a change of expression or voice, "and you fired again, this time hitting him in the temple and killing him instantly. But with the shot came a sudden recollection of my expected visit. Quickly you dragged the body of your master into the store-room, seizing a sheet from one of the chairs to bind up his bloody head, then returned here, stuffed the will into the fireplace and lighted it. Just at that moment I rang the bell, being earlier than expected, and you seemed caught. But a wild idea of concealing the body in the tunnel came into your mind, for you knew it would be impossible to hide it in the house here. You half dragged, half carried the body out the back way and concealed it on the braces in the passage. Fate was kind to you in that no one but a drunken woman saw you, so you left it there, intending to return later and dispose of it.

"On the way back to the house I saw you. The rest was simple; your guilty agitation seemed only natural terror and aroused no suspicion, but you had no opportunity to reach the body again."

"The eyes—they burned through the walls and stared at me day and night," cried Jean wildly.

"And yet you did it all in vain," Rochecarbon went on unrelentingly. "Monsieur Beauté had been reading the will in favor of Neville, not Alphonse, as he had reasoned. He was about to replace it in the secret hiding-place and get the other to destroy it when you killed him. So you burned the very one you sought to save."

"I did not mean to kill him—only to threaten," gasped Jean, pulling himself unsteadily to his feet. "And his eyes—his eyes!" He fell back again muttering.

Alphonse and Neville had jumped to their feet, gazing at Jean as if he were some loathsome beast; Madelaine had buried her head in her hands and was sobbing gently.

"Yet you were clever enough to cast suspicion on Alphonse for your deed. Wasn't that why you painted the heart on the mirror?"

"I thought it might—might——"

"And you tried in every other way to incriminate him. Was it merely to save yourself?"

"No!" Jean's voice rang out steadily as he half rose to his feet, clutching at the air for support. "It was to save Neville from suspicion—to save Neville—the one I—I loved!"

His voice had sunk to a whisper on the last words and he fell back into the chair, clawing at his throat and making horrible gasping sounds. Then suddenly his body crumpled and lay still.

Rochecarbon quickly bent over him, then turned toward the others, hiding the lifeless body with his own figure and motioning them to leave the room. Silently they obeyed, Neville tenderly supporting Madelaine, and Alphonse unconsciously squaring his shoulders with new resolution.

After they had left, Monsieur Goudet spoke:

"But how did you come to suspect him?"

"I was not quite sure," answered Rochecarbon. "There could be only three suspects, and I took this way of eliminating two of them—of forcing a confession. After all, there is such a thing as conscience. It has forced a confession of crime and"—he nodded thoughtfully toward the window from which the two brothers could be seen with Madelaine—"it has taught them a lesson which will never be forgotten, I think."

"You haven't answered my question yet," reminded Goudet after a moment.

"Oh, it was the woman in the café who gave me the clue. After I found the body in the tunnel, due to a spot of blood on my hat, I remembered how she had said, 'The funny man with his drunk friend.' Then I knew that was Jean, half carrying the body of his master, don't you see?"

[This Story was Broadcast by WJZ]

Tea For Two

By FRANK BLIGHTON

HIGH noon!

The hard brilliance of the day met the harder cobble-stones of Casanova Court in bitter battle.

The result was heat—waves of it that streamed down and then up, freighted with smells that were not from the spicy islands of "Araby, the blest," but from dying or dead banana skins, oranges giving their last gasp as fresh fruit, the scalding smell of alkali-impregnated vapor from a Chinese laundry, the reek of unclean and decrepit tenements crammed with old and young.

Pug Lee was passing and, indurated as he was to the seamy side of life, he wanted to hold his nose. Then he forgot he had an olfactory organ and knew only that he had eyes as Patrica Arno leaned from her window.

It was on the ground floor, facing the arch under which ran the narrow alley by which access was gained to Casanova Court. She did not seem to see the short man, built like a Hercules, whose face held a swarthy tinge and whose eyes a moment before had been filled with uneasiness and irascibility.

Then Patrica filled them to the exclusion of all other things in the world and he paused to drink in greedily the slope of her bare shoulders, the sweet, oval profile of her peony-tinted face, as she bent out to water the parched and stubby geraniums on the window-ledge in their dingy green box.

Patrica's unconsciously seductive movement was irresistible, and Pug Lee could make no stand against her sheer enchantment.

Not that Pug was a ladies' man. Far from it. He was a hard man—a reckless, improvident, daring man who avoided amorous adventures as one avoids a dread plague. To women he gave no headstrong devotion. They were the traps through which many an otherwise "good guy" had been "snared."

Pug was a profligate at times, as all crooks are, but no woman's sorcery ever held him for more than a passing hour. And that hour was always many miles from his last job. Nor was it ever embroidered with a remnant of friendliness or sympathy.

Pug breakfasted on battle, dined on a duel, if necessary. He was a thief of thieves. He could be malignant, peevish and detestable, but never careless of himself. He looked upon the wine when it was red, but until this fate-fraught instant the perfume of a woman at a distance had never turned the rancid air into a zephyr of ecstasy.

Then Patrica looked across the court at this strange, silent, formidable man. Her limpid eyes and bland face betrayed interest of a languid sort. She was a sweet flower set in a sordid garden with only weeds near by. And even they were stunted, dwarfed, anemic as they struggled up from between the stones of Casanova Court.

Pug Lee felt his heart beat quick and sudden in his breast. He cursed under his breath—not at the girl, and yet because of her. For he knew that in the last few seconds the aspect of his life had been changed.

Then Patrica smiled.

Pug grew dizzy.

The first thought that struggled to clearness out of the turmoil of his brain was that he was an unmitigated simpleton, a greater fool than he was a thief.

And that would never do. He had a "big job" on and he must have a clear head, although the sweet pain that stabbed him as he walked resolutely away made him stagger.

Then he laughed. He was passing a pushcart as he laughed. Tomorrow at this time, despite anything and everything, he would have a million dollars.

Some day he would come back and look this sweet flower over again. If its petals were still unsoiled amid the squalor of Casanova Court, he might pluck it and wear it—for a few minutes.

"Oranches! Punnanas!"

The insinuating voice of the man with the pushcart was more offensive than the sickening smell of his wares. Pug Lee gave him a glare of disdain. He walked on. He rounded the corner, walked down a flight of steps—and vanished from New York.

Hence he did not see the same peddler slowly propel his cart up to the court and into it, nor hear his sibilant accents as he plied his wares fruitlessly from door to door until he came to that where Patrica Arno sat in the window beyond, her face framed in her palm, her brooding eyes, tempting lips and bare shoulders the incarnation of innocence, the symbol of the world's desire.

"Oranches! Punnanas!"

She roused at the soft accents. She glanced at the fruit.

"How much?" she asked aloud. Then under her voice she whispered: "Pug stopped!"

The peddler spread his hands. "Four for twendy-fife cents. Punnanas, three for den." And in response: "Yes, I saw him. He'll be back."

Patrica languidly selected oranges. Then she haggled. So did the peddler. He recited the number of his children, the illness of his wife. She dropped a reluctant quarter into his greedy palm.

He wheeled out of the court along the hot street, still crying his wares. He came at last to another tenement and ascended the steps with a feeble, shambling gait. He entered the hall. Within he changed his disguise, cold-creamed his neck, wiping off the grease paint; his face twitched a little with the pain as he removed the surgeon's plaster that drew his youthful, plump cheeks into a goat-like visage; he took two tiny tin tubes out of his nostrils.

Then "Four O'Clock" Collins, one of the most shrewd, suave and fearless detectives of the Headquarters squad, left a basement door on the opposite side of the short block to make his report to his superior.

Next morning he was a much chagrined cop.

"One Million-Dollar Mail Robbery!"

The headlines hit him like a sledge between the eyes.

"That's Pug's job," he told himself, as he phoned his Chief and then wended his way gloomily toward the Federal Building to talk with the inspector in charge. It was a simple job, but an effective one. The railway junction in another State was Pug's "meat." A transfer of registered mail on a truck from one side of the station to the other; an incandescent lamp that flickered and died as a sinewy hand twisted it in its socket; and then the horried "gat" in the man's face who was pulling the truck.

It was all over before the limited mail train pulled in three minutes afterward. And Pug was gone. How? where? with whom? were insoluble questions to pursuing officers.

One fact alone stood out. The description that Four O'Clock Collins gave of Pug Lee fitted perfectly the telegraphed description of the robber.

"Where is he, do you think?" asked the inspector in charge of the New York detective who had "spotted" Pug and then lost him.

"I'll get him. I don't know where he is, but I know him."

Five weeks flew by. Pug had hidden the most of his booty. It was chiefly cash, jewelry and negotiable bonds. A king's ransom. He fled fast and far. In the hills he had selected as a hiding place he hunted and fished and read and dreamed.

He had left no trail either of himself or

his booty. He was quite alone save for one old negro, a toothless, shriveled but active and illiterate servant. Without another white man who could help him crystallize his thoughts and make concrete the sense of his own personality, Pug Lee could only commune with himself and dream of the girl.

Sometimes he cursed himself, sometimes the servant, who went flying out into the bushes at his maledictions. Pug had in his mind no definite plan of action, merely the torment of his first love. Through his fire at night and through his brain when the fire was ashes there raced pictures of sweet possibilities, of unformed schemes, incomplete visions.

Vague forces stirred and steamed within him and mounted to his head as the recurrent picture of the half-conscious, half-seductive smile of Patrica Arno came back, again and again. One morning he was gone. The gibbering old black man was comforted. Ten five-dollar bills were pinned to his pillow. That was affluence for him.

Twilight!

The pathos of supremely gorgeous tints from the sky, softened by the tall tenements and dimmed by the taller monoliths that towered a block or two beyond on lower Broadway, infiltrated Casanova Court.

Patrica Arno started to cross it and then out to the street beyond.

A deeper shadow cast its penumbra against the archway.

Pug Lee looked down at her.

He was no longer shy, although the swift ecstasy at sight of her stabbed him again as before. It did not embarrass him now. Rather it brought out all his natural bravado.

"Let me pass, please," said she.

"May I not speak with you? I came for that."

"About what?"

She stood breathing hard and trembling. He came a little closer. She watched his approach as some fascinated animal watches a huger and more powerful one.

He stopped. He caught her in his arms. With a half-scream she struggled to fend him off. Her little fist beat at his hard visage. Then he kissed her moist lips. She trembled. Pug Lee kissed her again. And this time her lips clung to his.

"We will go to the Waldorf," said he. "There is music, food, wine."

"In these clothes?"

"I have a cab. No one will look at your clothes."

She looked up at him with a shy, almost childish smile.

"You're a sport, ain't you? I was never in a big hotel in my life."

They took a table in a shaded corner.

Patrica was like a pleased child, without a child's caprices.

The velvet carpet at the entrance had entranced her. The blossoms behind the plate-glass windows—violets, roses, carnations, lilies-of-the-valley, vastly more lovely and alluring than when in a garden—sent her into transports of delight.

The lights, the light badinage of guests dining, the bewildering melody of color, the seraphic music, the cool, bubbly wine which she sipped—all carried to her a message new and strangely beautiful—and equally alluring to Pug Lee.

They were again outside and walking down the red carpet toward the cab. Then a man flashed a shield. Patrica started back, half-stunned. Pug Lee was in irons. It was all so quickly and deftly done. Then the three whirled down to the Federal Building.

They gave Patrica a ragged ordeal, and in Pug Lee's presence.

They learned nothing.

"He is only a friend. I have seen him but twice. I do not even know his name." She said no more save to reiterate this and add: "He was kind to me!" She was proof against all wiles or blandishments.

When they told her she could go, Patrica ran to Pug and kissed him.

"Be brave!" said she.

Pug was. He was a Stoic. The pyramids were not more immovable.

When arraigned he pleaded guilty.

"Forty years at hard labor!" said the judge.

Patrica burst into a sob. Her hand stole into his calloused palm. It nestled there.

Then they led him from her and took him away from New York manacled hand and foot, for Pug had been a circus acrobat when a youth, and his sinews were like steel and his lithe body as sinuous as a snake's.

Night!

A sombre grimness that only a prison holds closed in on the impregnable walls as Pug went to his cell on the third tier a week later. He stood at the door and answered "Here!" when the count came.

Outwardly he was still the Stoic. "Fate's a fiddler, life's a dance," he told himself. But now and again the secret fascination of the far-off girl in Casanova Court rose before his steely eyes. Then they softened, but his sturdy body with shoulders like the steel cantilever span of a bridge would swell and shake with rage.

"Forty years!" he muttered.

Outside his cell and starting at the corridor's end a tin plate began to slide along the floor with a bit of bread on it. It seemed to have a power of propulsion all its own, for the black thread that connected it with Pug's hand was invisible.

It darted under the door of his cell. He picked up the bread and the note beneath it.

"O. K. Scissors lined. Start the swing at 9. But kick him under the chin for luck. Grab his rod. Go on over. Buzz buggy at gully's end. Eagle over crest of hill. Driver knows."

Pug ate the note with the bread.

At 9 o'clock next morning his wheelbarrow full of cinders was being propelled by him toward the apex of the huge, high pile. Beyond on the crest of the wall, his back toward the convicts, stood Wall Guard Young—"Scissors" Young, the convicts called him because of his long legs. The note was from the warden's "runner," a New York crook, and known to be "right."

Pug stooped and released one of the heavy guy-wires which ran up two-thirds of the summit of the tall smokestack. He had cut it weeks before unseen, unguessed. Even the warden's runner did not know that. The end was looped and wrapped with belt-lacing so it would not cut his hand.

All "Scissors" knew was that Pug was "going over the wall." He had been liberally bribed, and was supposed to fire at the escaping convict and miss. Pug was making sure that he would miss, and in his own peculiar way.

In a trice he was on the roof, leaping to the eaves from the summit of the cinder pile. Then up the slanting gable until the wire in his hand was taut. He was now four times as high as the somnolent guard, and no one could see him, for the building was at a point in the wall where a view by other guards was impossible.

Pug thrust his foot into the loop in the loose end of the guy-wire, drew back and ran a few steps down the steep slant. He straightened his leg with the foot in the loop. He came down clinging to it and supported by it with frightful momentum some ninety feet, shot up thirty feet like an ascending meteor, and in a breathless arc rose about the wall's summit and the guard's head. Here he whipped his foot from the wire, now at its full length, and dropped like a hawk on a helpless hen.

"Scissors" Young was leaning against the guard rail. He went over it with Pug astride his neck and the convict's hands closed down on his windpipe like a garrote. The rifle struck at the same time as Pug, but against the turf below. He seized it and whirled. He was so close to the slant of the wall as to be still invisible.

The insensible form of the guard crumpled to the ground.

Pug leaped into the friendly gully and ran with the rifle down it like a jack rabbit. The fringe of bush sage and rank buffalo grass above its precipitous sides screened him from view.

The auto was there. And it was a dependable "buzz buggy"—a sedan with a welcome open door; a marvel of a machine that glided away around the base of the hill down which the gully ran with no more sound than the walking-beam of a ferry-boat in New York harbor when viewed from a mile away!

On the seat sat a stolid man. He did not say either "Oranches" or "Punannas!" He merely drove like Ben Hur—and then some! They were over the crest of the hill, and without a word the driver pulled up before the waiting monoplane.

That was the "Eagle."

For wealth has a potency that reaches not only from hovel to palace, but also at times into the heart of a fortalice of justice. It was not the first time that a convict had been "sprung" from a prison by liberal use of gold—part of the loot of the imprisoned man, sometimes with a pardon! For Pug was "cagey." He did not cache all of his plunder in one spot. He emerged from the auto in the suit of clothes which was ready for him within it. The garments were his size.

"Get in!" The chauffeur whipped off his cap and donned an aviator's helmet, tossing Pug another. "Stick into them fur-lined clothes. It's cold where we're traveling."

The speaker ran to the head of the plane. He twisted the propeller and leaped back. She fired. The tail stood straight up, even with Pug in the front seat. The aviator-chauffeur leaped into the rear one; he belted himself in; then he reached for the thong that "tipped" the wheel blocks, the machine swayed sideways a dizzy instant, straightened and rose with only its own huge black shadow below on the sun-flecked fields to see it, trumpeting like a flock of enraged elephants—a demoniacal defiance to any and all pursuit.

They pointed north, hopped over a fleecy cloud and beyond it to the ambient higher air, where only those ride whose hearts are filled with a great yearning. And Pug Lee's was one. Twelve hours later they were in a Canadian forest. Two hours more and Pug paid his chauffeur-aviator twenty-five thousand dollars—crisp, cash bills.

Midnight!

A solemn stillness.

A push-cart and a man.

A flickering, uncertain torch, wabbling and wavering with the crazy wheels of the ancient vehicle, casting grotesque but attenuated wraiths of shadows on the pavement along which it creaked, swayed or reeled.

"Oranches! Punannas!"

The soft, sibilant accents, the patient, unwearying, although slow, steps traversed street after street.

Sometimes a sale—at rare intervals.

More often a jeer from the unpitying or a scalding smile of contempt. But the old peddler did not desist, although at times he winced. He was sycophantic in his thanks to all purchasers, meagre as were the coins he received.

He paused at Casanova Court.

"Oranches! Punannas! Dank you, zir!"

A tough-looking youth sniffed a white powder ere he buried his rodent's teeth in the banana. "All clear!" he whispered. "Say, dere's a dude in a biled shoit tryin' to make your gal! Look out fer him! Of course, Patrica don't know yer out. She's settin' in the window back there in the dark. Hotter than the cellar-door of hell. Nobody c'n sleep!"

He suddenly lifted up his voice. The peddler trembled.

"Oh, Pat—want any oranges?"

"If they're fresh."

The tough youth was "Snow" Simpson, a "cokey."

"Dat's yer chance! Go on in! I'll fade out. See you in Joisey tomorrow."

The aged peddler pushed his rickety vehicle into the court. The very flags were sacred, the fresh weeds symbolized the delectable freshness of the unresisting lips that had been pressed close to his—unresisting in very truth!

"Oranches! Punannas!"

"Here!" Yes, it was Patrica Arno. She leaned from the window.

He wobbled over in her direction, his legs really unsteady.

"Pat!" he whispered.

"Poor old man," said the girl. "Do you never sleep?"

She reached for the oranges. Her velvet voice whispered a warning: "My God, Pug! You took an awful chance. The bulls have been here a hundred times. I

couldn't get out of their sight. No money!"

Aloud he replied: "You are sooch a kind young lady. So kind. And my vife at home, she is sooch a seeckness!"

"I'll make you a cup of tea!" said she. "Sit down on the steps!"

He complied. Her door was open. The little room beyond held only a bed, a gas-stove, a few pictures, some chairs, a table, a pin-point where the gas-jet outlined the murk within and quadrangle. There was one window—by courtesy—at the rear.

Pug took a long breath as he saw Patrica Arno's shadow outlined for an instant against it. She was to him that ever-fructifying genius of life, the apex of existence. All things else might know rest or death, but not Pug Lee until he had surmounted all remaining barriers. He swore as he sat there on the dank doorstep that she should drive forever away the alternating ecstasy and the torture that had always been his since the first glimpse of her had ignited the spark of divine madness that wove its magic spell.

Yet he was cool; above all, alert. His "gat" was handy. His disguise was perfect. If the disguise miscarried, Pug knew the gun would not miss!

He saw her lower the curtain ere she turned the gas-jet higher. It touched him that she should thus be so solicitous to preserve his safety. He had a happy, almost buoyant impulse to leap up and crush those lips like ripe pomegranates to his own bearded ones, for his beard was real, though starched stiff and white.

The kettle sang. Its hum carried a note that sanctioned all crime and that ennobled all Pug's past perils for her sake. For now he saw she was in a night-robe, although over this attire she had hastily tossed a well-worn house dress. Her tiny pink feet protruded from the rear of her slippers.

"Watch the arch," she whispered, suddenly coming over toward him. "There's a dude in a boiled shirt and evenin' dress been comin' in here late every night for a week, tryin' to make love to me! If I'd had a gun, I'd a-killed him. I couldn't miss that shirt front if I tried."

Her unbound hair swept so near he could have kissed it.

"Any bulls at night?" he asked as she turned to coil it up in front of a tiny mirror ere putting the tea in the caddy. The latent note of savagery in her voice when speaking of her nocturnal visitor pleased Pug immensely. It was very flattering, too.

"No; only the dude. You could break him over your knee. But, take no chances. I wish you'd sent me word. I mighta sneaked past the bulls 'nd got to you somehow."

She lifted the kettle from the stove and turned it out.

She poured the water into the caddy. "Milk or lemon?" she whispered; "and one lump of sugar or two?"

"The way you drink it," he whispered. He was already drunk; not with wine, with delight.

"Tea for two," he mumbled in his white beard. "And then we'll beat it. She'll go. A block from here the bulls'll never git either of us. And then—the rest of the million to spend. She's worth it!"

He devoured her with his eyes as she came over with the cup. She bent to give it to him. Then she straightened with a low cry of alarm.

Her finger suddenly shot out toward the arch. It stiffened with a strange mixture of hatred and fear.

"There he comes! That dude! Oh, Pug, don't take any chances! He may be a bull—a flattie. In fact, I think he is! His shirt! His shirt! Drop him!"

She was hysterical, but it was for him. Pug whipped out his "gat." The reeling dude was not ten yards away. He could not miss. He did not miss. The bark of the gun echoed against the sides of Casanova Court. It reverberated with horrid dissonance. The white shirt showed a hole. But the dude came on, although he reeled again. And again Pug fired, this time from ten feet.

And again the second ragged hole in the shirt-front showed him that he could not have missed. But the dude gave a bound as if he, too, were not only a ghost, but one

whose very soul stuff was of india-rubber. He leaped high and came down, his flying foot projecting a quite substantial toe beneath the muzzle of the pistol, lifting it so the third shot echoed but flew hopelessly wild—a shower of bricks and a shout of rage from a tenement above testifying to its flight.

A pile-driver seemed to drive at Pug Lee's hard, mystified face. He fell over, the gun flying from his fingers. The girl seized it. She drew back her arm as if to fire as the dude crashed again with his whole weight against Pug's prostrate form. He was handcuffed and helpless on the door-sill.

And still Patrica Arno did not fire!

Instead, she smiled.

"He took my tip!" she said. "Oh, Bill, are you hurt?"

And William Collins, alias Four O'Clock Collins, grinned his reassurance. He even stuck his fingers in the two ragged bullet holes in his otherwise immaculate white shirt-front to again reassure her ere he said:

"I guess this bird never heard of a bullet-proof vest. I come around as soon as you pulled down the curtain, Patrica. Well, he fell. I knew he'd fall the day I followed him up the street to the court. He didn't know I was a cop with that push-cart, or that you were my best girl—and just bait. We had to let him 'crush out' of the jail to get the swag. They've got it all down in the Federal Building."

He kicked the prostrate "hard man."

"Brace up, Pug! Take a look at me. Do I look natural? I ought to. I was your pal in the prison, wasn't I? Don't you remember the warden's runner? Well, that was me. And the chauffeur-aviator? Well, that was me, too! That was a fine ride we had together, eh? A couple of eagles. Well, I was just bait, too, the same as my little sweetheart here. And you bit—bit the first week I planted her here in Casanova Court where you couldn't help seeing her when you walked past."

Pug Lee turned an astounded and malevolent gaze toward the girl. He was livid. His fantasy of welding sin to innocence was forever fled.

"In fact," went on Four O'Clock Collins, "you bit twice. And you got another bite coming, too—the one you didn't finish in the big western pogie. Yep, we was both just bait for you, Pug. Come on. I hear the wagon's gong. As soon as you ride away I'm coming back to my wife. I see she's got the table set for tea for two!"

FIVE YEARS FOR "HANDKERCHIEF" GAME

JOHN KUCHARIK, 32 years old, posing as "the man from Texas," worked the old "handkerchief game," flimflammed Frank Komarek out of $1,500, and will be taken to Sing Sing to serve a sentence of five years, which was imposed upon him in the Queens County Court by Judge Burt J. Humphrey.

Komarek met a stranger at the Manhasset depot. The stranger told him he was from Texas, and he was hunting a man to whom he could entrust $1,500 which he had brought from the South to pay debts that had been left unpaid by his father some years ago, when he left Manhasset. He persuaded Komarek to go to Long Island City and take his savings from a bank, to be deposited in a satchel along with his own money as security that Komarek would carry out the terms of the agreement. Komarek was given a package which he supposed contained his own money and that of the stranger. Later when he opened it the package contained four $1 bills and a lot of paper.

Kucharik was arrested in Manhattan by Detectives Werle and Sadlo. He denied that he was the person who had fleeced Kucharik, but the jury that heard the evidence found him guilty.

The Ghosts of Alwyn Lodge

By JEAN ROSS

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

I SELDOM drink tea, but it was the first thing that came into my mind. Ketler nodded, but seemed unable to speak. His hand trembled pitifully as he weighed out the tea, spilling a goodly portion while doing so. I saw Alwyn, who had regained his composure, lean over the counter, and pricked my ears, though I affected not to listen.

"Buck up! Buck up!" came his whisper. "She's not——" The rest was lost to me. The storekeeper's agitation lessened.

"Will that be all?" he asked in a voice that was partially controlled.

"It seems as though there was something else," I replied, pretending to think, for I wanted an excuse to linger. "I'll take a big piece of that bacon. And slice it, please. I haven't a sharp knife, and I would not feel like using that dagger you were talking about, should I find it."

Purposely I made mention of the dagger, and I was rewarded by seeing a swift interchange of glances between the two men. Ketler, apparently reassured on some point, became more like his former self.

"How did you sleep last night?" It was only a commonplace question, but I felt that he was fishing for information.

"Splendidly," I lied. "I didn't wake up but once all night."

"Did you occupy the room you were working on?"

"No, I didn't get it done, so I slept downstairs on the cot I brought with me."

Again the two men exchanged glances. I would have given much for the power to read their thoughts. That they had guilty knowledge of what had chanced in that upper chamber I was sure, absurd though it seemed to think either one a murderer. Rather might they not have planned not to kill, but to frighten me in the way the logger had been frightened? They might wish to keep alive the cabin's reputation for being haunted. They must know that there was a possibility of the Springs booming, and that would make the lodge valuable. Perhaps they had been intending to buy it, had not Sanford forestalled them. If I, like some others, could be frightened away all might not be lost.

It was a plausible explanation, only—there was the dagger stuck into the bed where I had planned to sleep. That meant murder and nothing else, unless—a horrible thought came to me. Had the intruder been frightened by some ghostly apparition, and in his terror let fall the knife? That would account for the relief in the men's faces, if murder had not been their intention. Ketler was speaking again:

"If you still want help, perhaps you could get Mrs. Burt. She used to work at the lodge whenever it was tenanted, and though she's getting along in years, she might lend you a hand."

"Where does she live?"

Surely there could be no hidden design in this suggestion, was my thought. But perhaps I was mistaken, for as I took the road up the valley that Ketler pointed out, I turned for a last look ere a curve hid the store from sight. I was just in time to see Alwyn leave the place. From his direction he might be going to the lodge, or he might not.

Without difficulty I found Mrs. Burt's house, a charming bungalow that I loved at first sight. And the owner was as delight-

ful as her abode, a sociable, newsy woman, friendly and hospitable.

"I'm sorry, Miss Wilson, that I cannot help you," was her answer when I had stated my errand. "I haven't the strength I once had, so I take things more easy. I do a bit of nursing now and then—just got back from a scarlet fever case—but that is all. But come in and rest a moment, while we get acquainted."

The moment became a half-hour, for my hostess had much to say of Alwyn Lodge and the people who had lived there. She placed no belief in the sinister legend.

"Evil spirits indeed! The only evil spirits that cabin ever harbored dwelt in the hearts of the Alwyns themselves. A rough, carousing set they were, and the people they associated with were of a like nature. It's a wonder there weren't more killings than there were."

"But after the Alwyns left, weren't there other deaths?"

"Accidental, every one of them. I was working there at the time, and I know what I'm talking about. There was a man killed out hunting; his companion shot first, and looked afterwards, the way some foods do. And another was thrown from his horse, and a foolhardly boy who was climbing over the cliffs fell off and was drowned. Had the accidents happened anywhere else no one would have given them a second thought."

"But Ketler told me a girl and a tramp were found dead there recently."

Mrs. Burt was less outspoken when she answered:

"I've never felt just easy in my mind about those tragedies. Alice Maynard might have slipped and fallen, and again she might have been struck down. And the tramp might have been killed by his comrades, but we are so far from a railroad that we seldom see more than one tramp at a time. I can't help feeling that it's not safe for a girl like you to stay in that cabin alone."

"But how could any one get in with those heavy locks on the doors?"

"There may be more ways of getting in than you imagine. There used to be tales about Tom Alwyn sneaking out nights to play poker. His wife used to lock him in his room at times, so folks said, but that did not stop him. I suppose he bribed a servant to let him out, but still there might be ways to get in and out."

"But how could any mischief-maker find out about such things?"

"Young Tom Alwyn might know, and likewise he might have keys to all the doors. He's the grandson of the first Alwyn, and though I don't believe he would harm you himself, he runs with a bad lot and he drinks. If there's a secret, he's told it a dozen times, and if he had the keys he may have left them where other folks could find them. And I wouldn't trust one of the gang that hangs around that hotel where he lives. Who they are, or where they drifted in from, no one knows, but they seem to have plenty of money, though where they get it is beyond me. Since they arrived at the Springs I'm disgusted with the place, and I'd sell out in a minute if I could get my price."

But I had a task before me, and I could not linger. Before I left Mrs. Burt extracted from me a half promise not to spend another night at the lodge.

"I've a spare room that you can have as well as not, and my mind will rest easier, if yours doesn't."

That I did not tell the good woman of the dagger must have been due to an awakened suspicion of the whole world. For the same reason I made no attempt to locate a peace officer. Whom could I trust? Caution said, no one. And yet, in defiance of all the rules of safety, I trusted a tramp. I met him as I crossed the lawn on my return to the lodge, a dusty, sun-browned young man, with a blanket roll over his shoulder. Yet there was little of the typical hobo about him. He was clean, for one thing, and his freckled face, topped with a mop of sandy hair, was that of a good, honest boy. He smiled as he lifted his hat, a good-humored, wide-mouthed smile.

"I'm looking for work, ma'am," was almost his first words.

"Would you consider a job of housecleaning?" I asked.

"Lead me to it. Wages? Whatever is the union rate for scrub-ladies."

"What shall I call you?" I asked when we had settled upon a rate.

"Just make it Billy Kid."

"Not Billy, the Kid?" I returned, recalling the name of a famous desperado. He grinned appreciatively.

"Either that, or Captain Kidd; I'll answer to both."

Nor were those names so very inappropriate, perhaps, for as Billy laid aside his blanket role I saw that he wore an automatic pistol at his belt. Later, as he raised his arms to take down some draperies, I marked a suspicious-looking bulge below his left arm-pit. What sort of a wild lad was this that carried two guns? I opened my lips to speak the words that would send him on his way, but they were never uttered. For I was afraid, not of this wayfarer, however tough he might be, but of this old cabin. Most of all I was afraid of that room upstairs where the first Alwyn had been murdered. But there was a dreadful fascination about the place which drew me in spite of myself. And with Billy at work taking up the living-room carpet, surely it was safe enough for me to ascend the stairs and take another look into the haunted chamber.

Again I crossed the threshold, again I halted aghast, while reason itself seemed to totter. The knife was gone!

CHAPTER FIVE

SLOWLY, cautiously, I approached to see if the dagger had fallen from its place, but though the bed and tumbled blankets were as before, that knife of sinister legend was nowhere to be seen. Was there truth in that weird story of a ghostly knife that appeared to people? Or had my imagination been at fault? I would not accept either theory. A real knife had been here; now it was gone, and human hands had removed it. I had been away from the lodge for an hour; there had been ample time for some one—possibly Alwyn—to have come and gone. Ketler might have sent me on a fool's errand to Mrs. Burt's, that there might be opportunity to recover the knife, so I would not learn that a crime had been attempted and be on my guard.

Still, there should remain some tangible evidence of the dagger's thrust. With a trembling hand I spread out the tumbled blanket. Unlike the others I had discovered, it had not been put away with care, and the moths had made sad havoc. There were scores of holes, and though I found one whose threads were sharply cut, I could not say with certainty that a knife had slashed it. And in the rotted cloth cover of the bolster there were many slits. But on the inside, when I turned it over, I discovered a splinter newly torn from its place by some sharp instrument that had pierced the thin wooden shell.

With something like relief—for now I was sure my enemies were mortal—I sank down upon the side of the bed. I wanted to think, but I had no time for reflection. Staring up at me from the dark wood floor was a ghostly footprint!

The nervous thrill which the sight gave me quickly passed, as I realized its nature. When I had seen the dagger I had dropped the open package of soap-powder, and the contents had been distributed over a wide area. Whoever had entered had not noticed what was underfoot, and had left a distinct imprint of a man's shoe. Nor was that all. Particles had clung to the sole so that there was a faint trail across the room to a panel in a corner. I was on the verge of a discovery.

Feverishly I ran my hand over the panel and the molding about it. At last I found it, the sunken screwhead which, when pressed, gave way with a metallic click and the panel swung inward like a door. Beyond the opening a narrow staircase led downward into dimness. I had found the way by which the first Alwyn had eluded the vigilance of a shrewish wife, the way by which his slayer had presumably entered, when the master of the lodge was found murdered behind a door locked on the inner side. But what awful secrets lay at the foot of those stairs? Dare I explore?

Somewhere I found the courage—or foolhardiness—to make the descent. But first I must hesitate while I drew strength from Billy's whistle in the room below. His arrival must have been noted; surely the intruder had fled. Such a one would not linger to do injury to a woman who had a protector at hand. That Billy might be linked with my enemies did not occur to me. As I have stated, from the very first I trusted my tramp.

Yet my mental state may be judged from the fact that I did not summon him to accompany me. Had the stairs led down into total darkness I might have been less resolute, but there was only a dimness below like that of a poorly lighted cellar. Down the creaking stairs I passed between close walls that left but a narrow way. At what I judged to be the level of the lower floor the steps ceased, and I stood upon bare rock. From this platform or ledge another shorter flight led down into a basement.

I grasped the plan of the house's foundation. The lodge had been built astride an upstanding ridge of stone, which formed the central support of the structure. On the landward side the rock had been chiseled to make a smoothly finished wall, as I had previously noted in my examination of the basement proper. But on the seaward side it had been left in its natural condition, hence this hidden cellar was of irregular shape. To my right a considerable space opened, while to my left there was room only for a passageway between the ledge and the outer wall.

Tiny windows let in a dim light, and I saw that the place was crowded with machinery. I have been much about Sanford's shop, so I was able to name some of the objects I saw—a lathe, a big motor and a die press. A name-plate on the latter caught my eye—"Machine Tools, Inc." This then was where the defunct company had secreted their machinery, possibly to forestall some sheriff's sale. Now I could understand Ketler's motive in spying upon me.

But how had the stuff been brought here? I turned to the passageway at my left. It was gloomy and dank, but at the far end I could see light, and I advanced without hesitation. At the far end a rude door of rough boarding, fastened on the outer side, barred my way. But a peep through the crevices showed me all. The tunnel led into the hayloft of the stable that had been built against the terrace wall. The first Alwyn had planned well his secret exit. Satisfied that I had laid more than one ghost, I started to retrace my steps. All that remained was a bit of detective work to discover the identity of my enemies and the motive that inspired them.

Did I speak too confidently? Did this hidden cellar hold grisly secrets not yet revealed? As I gained the foot of the stairway I halted, listening, listening. Then I heard it, a low breathing close at hand. And then I saw it! Half under, half to one side of the staircase, was a dark corner, and crouched there was a dim shape, something that had life. It moved slightly, as though peering for a better look at me, and into the dim light came a face, human in outline, but haggard and drawn, with a ghastly scar across the forehead and temple. Wan and ghostly, it was like the face of the dead. And the face was one I had known and loved in the long ago, the face of Dick Hayden, killed in France in Nineteen-Eighteen!

Panic-stricken, I fled up the steep stairs, daring not to look behind, but conscious that something was following me, was calling to me in a hushed, ghostly voice, bidding me stay. Diving through the panel, I slammed it behind me, but either the spring did not catch or the creature behind was near enough to prevent its closing. That thought added to my terror. Across the wide chamber I fled, and out into the corridor, tripping and nearly falling over the carpet I had piled there. A horrible remembrance of that daughter of the Alwyns, who had been found dead at the foot of the great staircase, flashed through my brain as I sped down the steps. Had she, too, been pursued by a ghostly apparition?

"Billy," I cried in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper.

But Billy was not in the living-room. Both he and the carpet were gone. Fran-

tically I tore at the bolts of the hall door. They had not been undone that morning, for Billy and I had entered at the rear. What ailed my fingers? Had they lost their strength? And that grisly thing was still following; I could hear the soft pad of feet on the carpeted treads, could hear the same low voice saying I knew not what. A bolt slipped back; one moment more and I would be free. But the creature was upon me! Its hand, paw rather, was upon my shoulder! My senses reeled; I screamed and fainted.

CHAPTER SIX

I CAME back to consciousness to find myself lying on the antiquated sofa in the living-room, with Billy industriously sopping my face with a wet handkerchief.

"What happened, Miss Wilson?" he asked, when I was myself again. "I had just taken the carpet outside when I heard you scream, and rushed in to find you on the floor in a faint. Did something frighten you?"

With Billy's freckled face bending over me it was absurd to speak of pursuing phantoms. Nor could I say with certainty that I had been pursued. My fright and a vivid imagination might have been responsible for an impression wholly false.

"I thought I saw a tramp," I stammered, easing my conscience with the thought that I might be right. Hoboes, seeking shelter in the stable, might have discovered the tunnel and made the cellar their hangout.

"Where?" came Billy's next question.

"Upstairs, in the rear chamber."

For one moment Billy eyed me with narrowed lids. But if he doubted he professed to believe.

"I'll have a look up there," he offered.

"You'll be careful, won't you?" I begged.

"Don't you worry about your two-gun man," he tossed back over his shoulder with a laugh. In a little while he was back.

"No sign of any one. I looked in all the closets and under all the beds. If you really saw a tramp, he's beat it down the back stairs."

"Or down the secret way." Had I uttered those five words, which were upon my tongue, I would have spared myself much worry in the hours that were to come, but before I could speak a change in the boy's manner surprised me into silence. Hitherto his attitude had been one of respected equality, but now he was servile, almost cringing.

"Yes, miss, I get you. The front chamber on the right as I go up."

He gathered up his brooms and brushes and left. He was playing a part, but for whom? Turning, I saw Ketler standing in the archway that led to the dining-room. Why was the man always hanging about, sneaking in as though to take me unawares? Oh, had he been the one who had frightened me, and was he now returning to gloat over my remains? The surprise in his tone when he spoke banished that theory.

"Are you sick, Miss Wilson?"

"No, just a bit of faintness," I lied. "Very likely I've been attempting too much."

"Who is that boy?"

"A young man who came along looking for work."

"A hobo? You'd do well to watch him."

"He seems like a decent chap, but I'll be careful," I responded.

"Did he give you his name?"

"He said I might call him Billy, the Kid. Seeing that he wears two guns, it ought to be appropriate."

Purposely I made mention of Billy's armament. It might be safer for us both if the tale went abroad that he was able to defend himself.

"With him about, of course you won't be staying here at night?"

Once more I sensed that air of relief in his manner, and knew that this man wished no evil to befall me.

"No, Mrs. Burt has offered me a room."

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"I'm glad. A woman is pretty helpless, but a man has at least a fighting chance against men or devils."

Abruptly he turned away as though he

feared lest he had said too much. What had he meant? To convey a warning? But against what? I dismissed my theory that the hidden cellar was a tramps' refuge. Something grimmer, more to be feared, had its lair there. Some half-human monster? Such creatures exist, as every doctor and nurse can testify. And the Alwyns, drunken and dissolute, might have been cursed by such offspring. Some mistaken family pride, or fear of damage suits by injured parties, might have impelled them to keep its existence a secret.

With a determination that conquered my fear of that haunted chamber I climbed the stairs and locked the door. I would have barricaded the panel, only I did not dare. I was afraid lest some hideous thing spring out and seize me, if I but ventured to approach it. Nor could I call Billy to protect me. He would have demanded an explanation, and I knew something of boys. He would have insisted on exploring that cellar from end to end, and God knows what tragedy would have ensued.

Leaving the key in the lock, I whittled splinters which I drove in beside it till it was immovable. That door, I was satisfied, could never be forced without breaking it down, and the noise would arouse a sleeper. Billy should have his fighting chance.

For Billy's occupancy I had him prepare the front chamber where the first Mrs. Alwyn had died. Though her death had been attributed to poison, that at least was nothing contagious. The hours passed calmly enough, but as the day drew to its close I found my nerves becoming more and more unsteady, and I was eager to be gone from that house of mystery. Accordingly I set about preparing supper, and descended the basement stairs to call Billy, who was beating a rug outside, to bring me an armful of wood.

From the service-hall the boxed-in stairs led down to a passageway running at right angles to their direction. On one side of this passage was the laundry, on the other a general storeroom, now partly filled by the boxes and bales that Ketler had placed there, and at the far end was an outside door. The sun was low, and long shafts of light from the western windows were flung across the length of the storeroom, through its open door and into the passage. Even as I halted on the lower step and called to Billy, I saw a shadow creep into that brightly lighted rectangle, the shadow of a huge, crouching form with upraised hand. And in that hand a knife or bludgeon!

Oh, for the courage to step down into the passage and see for myself who or what it was that was lying in wait for Billy, who, in answer to my summons, was even now opening the outside door. A step or two more and he would meet his doom on the spot where pretty Alice Maynard had been found with a crushed skull.

That thought broke the spell of dumb terror that had me in its grip.

"Stop, Billy! Danger! The storeroom!" I screamed at him.

I saw the menacing shadow leap away, saw Billy draw his gun and advance stealthily to the storeroom door.

"Oh, be careful," I cautioned. "It"—why I used that pronoun I could not have explained—"may be hiding behind the boxes."

But he paid me no heed. I saw him slip into the room, and then I waited tensely. After what seemed a long, long time he was back.

"Nothing there, not a thing. What did you see?"

"Only a shadow," I explained, and told him all.

He listened attentively, but made no comment. Yet he was unusually thoughtful, and my suspicions were aroused. Had he told me everything?

I found an excuse for sending him away, and tremulously entered the storeroom. Ketler's goods occupied but a small part of the floor space, and over the remainder the dust lay deep. Stooping low, I saw the prints of stockinged feet leading to and from the doorway. I followed them. At the central foundation wall they ceased abruptly. It was as though they had passed through that solid barrier.

Could there be an opening? The rocky

ridge that formed the central support of the house had not been continuous for its entire length, and here a wide gap had been filled with solid blocks of masonry, as immovable apparently as the living rock itself. Vainly I searched for doorway or a movable slab. There was none, not even a crack in that smoothly dressed surface. And yet were there a way of entrance it would lead directly into that dark corner where I had seen that awful thing with the scarred face.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WITH horror once more gripping me, I backed away from that wall as though I feared the heavy masonry would yawn and fling forth some hideous creature to destroy me. Yet I was not too overcome to notice the prints of Billy's nobnailed shoes. At one side of the trail, quite as though he had purposely refrained from stepping upon it, they followed till they reached the wall. There they halted as though the wearer had stood there studying the situation.

But why had he kept silence? Who and what was this two-gun lad—one of a gang of bandits, who had made the lodge their hiding place? Then why should he be singled out for attack? Or was the murderer some half-human creature that killed without discrimination? My faith in my helper returned. Almost I was persuaded to confide in him absolutely.

I believe that is what I would have done had not Ketler put in an appearance. He seemed to have no errand, only the curiosity of a villager to pry into the affairs of others. He lingered till we had had our supper, and it was time for me to go. Thus I was given no opportunity for private speech with Billy, though with my last word I warned him:

"Be sure and lock up carefully. I'm not sure but that I did see a tramp in the basement, even if you did say it was all nonsense."

Purposely had I made mention of a tramp; Ketler might have heard of the incident from another source, and thus would he learn that we were on guard.

"Don't you worry about your two-gun man," Billy responded with his customary grin. He threw open a window. "See that dead limb on that shrub out there?"

There was a swift movement of his right hand, the bark of the gun, and the severed branch fell to the ground.

"I bet I could wing a ghost with that toy," he boasted, as he fondled his weapon. Had he staged the act for Ketler's benefit? I wondered.

The storekeeper accompanied me to the foot of the terrace, where he pointed out a path that led directly to the bungalow, a much nearer route than around through the village. Mrs. Burt showed no surprise at my acceptance of her hospitality, but led me to a charming sleeping-room with a French window that opened out upon a side porch.

"I'll give you a key to that window," she offered. "Then in case I'm called away you can come and go as you please, even though I lock up the rest of the house."

Little did I think how soon I was to make use of that key. Some one has said that there is no driving lash equal to a New England conscience, and that night I learned the truth of the maxim—for I had failed to warn Billy of the fate that befell all those who slept within that ghost-ridden house. Vainly did I tell myself that he was a man, well armed, and the hint I had given him should be sufficient. That ever accusing conscience would not rest. Again and again it told me that he was a careless boy, with no thought of an enemy beyond a possible tramp. Nothing he knew of that horrible thing with the face of a corpse which walked the place by night, a thing that could pass through solid walls of stone, and carried a ghostly knife which dealt death to all it encountered. What though I had locked a door against it? There might be secret panels in other rooms. I could picture the hideous thing creeping from its lair and stealing upon the sleeping lad.

I could not sleep. I heard the clock in

the next room chiming the hours, the half-hours. Eleven, half-past, and at twelve—so all weird tradition asserted—the evil spirits walked!

No longer could I endure the suspense of inaction. Slipping from my bed, I dressed hurriedly. What was I going to do? I scarcely knew, save that I was going to that demon-ridden lodge to awaken the lad and warn him of the peril that menaced him. With hands that trembled I unlocked the window. With noiseless step I crossed the porch, and sped along the moon-lighted path to the terrace steps, up the long flights, and across the lawn. If only I were in time! I tried the big door; it was locked, but opened to my key. Billy, careless youth, had not heeded my warning, and the extra bolt was not in place.

As the door swung open common sense returned to me. What mad, indiscreet act was this, coming thus, alone and unchaperoned, at the midnight hour to the lodging place of a young man of whom I knew nothing? And coming with a wild tale of a secret cellar, where lurked something that might be dangerous? Were Billy the cleanest-minded boy in the world, the best opinion I could hope from him would be that I was half crazy. If he were not—my cheeks went hot with shame.

But now that I had come thus far, would it not be well for my own peace of mind to enter and make sure that all was as it should be on the upper floor? Slipping inside, I stood for a moment listening, but all was silent save for the ticking of the clock I had set going that day. Leaving the door slightly ajar, that a way of retreat be open, I stole across the hall and up the padded stairs till my head was on a level with the floor of the corridor above. The doors of the rooms to right and left were open, so—the moon being near the full—the hall was dimly lighted. Not a thing was stirring; there was no sound save the regular breathing of a sleeping person in the front chamber, for Billy apparently had left his door open. I was turning to go, when from below came the first stroke of the clock sounding the midnight hour. Now was the crucial moment!

With a dread too awful to put into words, my eyes clung to the locked door of the haunted chamber. Did I hear a click like that of a bolt being drawn? Impossible. Slowly, noiselessly, it swung wide, and in the doorway I saw the dim outline of something that moved, that had life.

For one moment I cowered there on the stairs, too sick with terror to move or cry out. Then I mastered myself enough to slink away down the stairs, away from that supernatural thing which found locked doors no barrier. And to add to my terror came the realization that I was in more danger than Billy—I was nearer. Yet the boy should not be left unwarned. As soon as I reached the door I would scream with all the power of my lungs. But would I ever reach that door? Though really I must have sped down those few steps at lightning speed, it seemed that never had my feet been so heavy, never had my breath so failed me.

And my warning was never uttered, for as my hand found the doorknob, from the hall above came tumult; a sound as of two great beasts in deadly combat. The door slammed behind me, but I take pride in the fact that I did not flee at once; that in spite of my terror I still had thought for the boy upstairs. Had that hideous creature pounced upon him? What was it that Ketler had said—that a man would have a fighting chance? But Billy was a lad, scarcely come to man's strength. Was there anything that I, weak and weaponless, could do? Enter and turn on those decrepit lights? Would that help?

There was no time for action. As I stood peering in at the narrow windows beside the door down the stairway hurtled a bulky thing, whether man or beast I could not say. The moon was behind me, and a long shaft of light reached from the window beside me almost to the foot of the staircase. Into that lighted area the thing tumbled, and again I saw that corpse-like face with its ghastly scar—the face of my slain lover!

This time there was no staying the panic that sent me flying across the lawn to the top of the terrace steps. There I paused,

only to cast one last glance behind me. I saw the lights flash up in Billy's room, then in the hallways. Praise be, the boy had escaped!

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITH the light of a fair September morning pouring in at my window, I was ready to believe that my experience of the night had been but a frightful nightmare. But I was still fully clothed, for upon reaching the bungalow I had been too exhausted to do more than cast myself across the bed. It had been no dream; I really had paid a visit to the lodge, but of what I had seen there I dared not think. And I shrank from the revelation that might be awaiting my return to the lodge. I welcomed Mrs. Burt's invitation to breakfast with her. Yet I must have been poor company, for all the while I was listening and waiting for Billy to arrive with a tale of strange happenings at the cabin. But he did not appear, and I became alarmed. What had happened after I had fled? Against mortals Billy was armed, but against other things—— With anxious heart I turned reluctant feet toward the lodge. I was afraid, but I must discover what had happened.

Smoke pouring from the kitchen chimney and the odor of frying bacon reassured me. A man who was able to cook and eat need cause me no worry. But what hideous thing might lie dead in the hall? With the idea of knowing the worst, I entered by the front door, and found—nothing. No cold form, hideous even in death, no pools of blood upon the carpet, nothing to indicate a struggle had taken place. And Billy, whom I found already at work, was as cheerful and as gay as ever.

Was the whole episode but a creation of my own brain? To be sure I had arisen and dressed, but might not sleepwalking account for that act? What was I to believe? Was this old cabin with its atmosphere of mystery driving me to insanity? What proof was there that I had really seen what I believed? Let the locked door of that haunted chamber be my proof!

I found the key in the lock just as I had placed it. Bending closer, I felt my senses going as I saw that the wedges were still in place. The door could not have opened; I had been the victim of a dreadful delusion. Gold help me, my sanity was going!

Half fainting, I grasped the doorknob for support. It turned and the door swung open. I forgot my fear of the secret panel and what lay behind it in my glad relief. The sight I had seen in the night had been no figment of a disordered brain. I was still sane. But what was the secret of the door opening thus? A trick lock? It was some moments before I discovered the knob, disguised as a screw, that controlled the bolt independent of the key, but at last the secret was mine.

Refastening the door as best I might, I went in search of Billy, determined to get the full account of what happened in the night. But I did not. It was a difficult subject to approach. It would be necessary to tell of my midnight visit to the lodge, and I shrank from the construction he might put upon my act. Instead, I waited for him to speak, but as he kept silent I was forced to do likewise.

I looked for Ketler to pay us his customary visit, but he failed to put in an appearance. The thought came to me that instead of seeking news he was waiting for it to be brought to him, waiting till I came rushing to the village with the story of the latest tragedy of the lodge.

As the morning wore away I became aware that Billy was on the verge of some disclosure, and I waited impatiently. But it was not until we had finished our noonday meal that he spoke.

"Miss Wilson, I'm going away, and I wish you would leave also."

"Surely you are not suggesting that we elope?" I answered lightly.

Let me say here that there had never been anything of a sentimental nature between us. Mutual liking there was, but nothing more. I had never forgotten the past, and Billy—as I was to learn later—had a girl in San Francisco. But he responded

to my sally with his boyish smile and paid me the obvious compliment.

"I'd enjoy it, but I reckon you'd balk. But speaking seriously"—and his voice grew graver than I had ever heard it—"this place is unsafe."

With this new gravity upon him the truth came to me that Billy was older than I had thought, that men of his blonde type often retain a semblance of callowness long after their first youth has passed. I had regarded him as a lad, but now he seemed of my own age, or older.

"Just what do you mean?" I asked.

"Just what I say. If certain—er—ghosts have learned that you have discovered that secret cellar your life is in danger."

I could only stare at him in bewilderment. I had told him nothing; how had he learned? "What do you mean?"

"More than you suspect. I know what you found, and what frightened you. But why did you not tell me?"

"I thought I had imagined it all, and I was afraid you would laugh."

"I see. If you had been frank I would have told you everything, but I did not trust you. But I am trusting you now, so let me say that I did not come here by chance; I came for a purpose."

"And that purpose?"

"There's no time to explain now." Billy, who was sitting by a window, was looking out across the lawn, and I knew that some one was approaching. "But get this—don't stay in this cabin one minute after nightfall! And leave before then if you can do so without causing too much talk. Go down and stay with that good woman, or better still, get out of the Springs entirely for a week or so. And don't come back till I lay that ghost!"

Abruptly he rose and hurried away upstairs. I was alone when Ketler, stealthily as ever, entered the room, but a moment later Billy was back. His blanket-roll was over his shoulder, and again he was a hobo ready for the road.

"If you'll pay me my day's wages I'll be drifting along."

"But what is the trouble? Aren't you satisfied?" I felt that Billy had purposely staged this parting scene before Ketler, and I must express surprise at his action.

"I ain't complaining of the work, Miss, but I ain't got the nerve to stay in a place where things jump out of the dark and grab you."

"Jump out of the dark?" This time my surprise was genuine.

"Yes, Miss, that's what happened last night. I thought I heard something, and mindful of what you said about tramps, I went poking around a bit. There was nothing in sight, and I was just going back to my room when, right at the head of the stairs, I bumped into something. First thing I knew I was rolling over and over down them stairs. Soon as I could pick myself up I switched on the lights and hunted all over, but I couldn't find a thing. Whatever I fought with, it weren't human!"

"Sure you didn't have a nightmare and dream it all?" I ventured.

"Dreams don't leave a man all covered with bruises. There are marks on my flesh —scratches made by claws!"

"I wonder that you stayed here the rest of the night," came Ketler's comment.

"I wouldn't have, only having tramps on my mind, I thought a man with a couple of guns really needn't worry. But after thinking over how the thing vanished without leaving a sign, I know it was neither man nor beast. It was a ha'nt! So I'm quitting, and if the young lady is wise, she'll be leaving, too!"

Billy took the money I proffered him and, like the hobo he professed to be, shambled out of the house and down the drive. I watched him with my mind in a whirl. Why had he lied? He had described what I myself had seen, only that thing with the scarred face which had tumbled down the stairway had *not* been Billy Kidd. I had not been too unnerved to recognize one I knew. But why had he taken the rôle upon himself? To conceal from Ketler the presence of the scarred one in that house of mystery? That would indicate that Billy and the hideous thing were allies, and that could never be.

And with what other man or creature had

the thing fought? For there must have been another. Billy had been asleep in the front chamber; I had heard his breathing as I stood on the stairs. In the few seconds it had taken me to reach the door below there had been no time for him to awaken and rush out along the length of the passage beside the stair wall to the spot where the struggle had occurred. No, something else had been there, presumably in some nearby room, waiting for the locked door to open. Did the lodge contain two uncouth monsters that like two wild beats fought over the prey they stalked? Yet if that were the explanation, why need Billy to have lied? For he knew the secret; of that I was certain.

I became conscious that Ketler was watching me, and instinctively I concealed my thoughts. With an exclamation of disgust I made a gesture in the direction Billy had taken.

"With a hobo spreading that yarn over the country it's going to be hard to find help. I've a good mind to drop the whole thing."

Ketler agreed almost too readily. "That strikes me as a sensible idea. The harvest season is about over, and the ranchers will be letting their help go in a week or two, and then there will be plenty you can hire, men who'll have nerve enough to work daytimes, even if they go home at night. Why not go back to the city and let the matter ride a while—unless there's some reason for your hurry?"

It was not bad advice, and there was no particular need for haste on my part. If the syndicate took over the Springs it still might be months before they would be ready to listen to any proposal of Sanford's. And I would need to go back to the city before long for materials that only a big town could supply. Had any one else made the suggestion I would have acted upon it. As it was, Ketler's words only stiffened my resolution not to give in.

Had it not been for this new stubbornness I would have quitted the cabin the moment I found myself alone, and taken shelter with Mrs. Burt. Instead, I remained at the cabin; though, let me add, I did not spend one unnecessary moment inside. Billy had unearthed a lengthy clothesline, which he had hung up and draped with rugs and blankets taken from the house. And there in the wholesome outdoor world I worked away removing the dust of years. And later, when it was time to carry the things inside, I made no attempt to restore them to their proper places, but dumped everything upon the living-room floor, at the same time leaving the hall door wide open that I might have a way of retreat.

For supper I made a hurried visit to the kitchen, where I devoured the remnants of previous meals, standing as I did so, ready poised for instant flight. For the sun was sinking, and I could not forget Billy's warning that I must be gone before nightfall, nor must I return till the ghost was laid.

Yet I was to return to that place of peril shortly after leaving it. As I approached Mrs. Burt's home a man intercepted me. He was a loafer that I had seen about Ketler's store, though not till later was the significance of that fact to occur to me.

"I'm sorry, Miss Wilson, but you cannot go to Mrs. Burt's. The house is quarantined."

Quarantined? What ghastly trick was this? But on the bungalow wall I saw the familiar red placard with the words "Scarlet Fever," and I recalled that my hostess had spoken of a case that she had attended.

"She was taken sick just after you left this morning. The doctor put up that sign, and told me to keep folks away."

Vainly I tried to explain that the room I had occupied was apart from the rest of the house, that I had no fear of the disease. He was apologetic, but adamant. He had his orders; they must be carried out.

"But my things are all there. And where else can I stay?" I demanded helplessly.

"Oh, most anybody will take you in—unless you have been exposed," came the careless answer.

Exposed? I had eaten breakfast with the woman shortly before she had been taken ill. It would be useless to ask lodging of the villages, such is the fear of contagious diseases, not when I possessed a shelter of my own. Nor could I plead that it was un-

safe to stay at the lodge, when already I had spent a night there and suffered no harm. And where was my proof of the preposterous tale of my experiences?

Slowly I turned to retrace my steps; there was nothing else to do. But at the foot of the terrace I was again halted, this time by Alwyn. His face was harassed and worn; if ever a man gave an impression of an uneasy conscience he was that man.

"Miss Wilson, you must not go back to the lodge tonight. It's not safe."

"Where else can I go?" I asked wearily.

"Back to your own home. I'll take you in my car. If you'll hold your tongue and stay there a week, it will be safe for you to come back afterwards."

For an instant I stared astonished. Then I understood, or thought I did. That hidden cellar did harbor a monster, and Alwyn was pleading for time to remove it secretly to some one of the retreats provided for such unfortunates. Yet I wished to know more.

"If you care to make further explanations, I will respect a confidence."

"Miss Wilson," he said earnestly, "I can't explain; I dare not. I am risking everything to give you this chance. Don't pretend that you don't understand; that handkerchief you dropped gave the game away."

Handkerchief? I had lost one the day before. But where? In that cellar? I could not remember. But Alwyn was continuing:

"Girl, if you knew what you are up against you would not try to fight those demons up there." He waved his hand toward the lodge.

"Demons? Then the place is haunted?"

"Haunted? Yes, that is the right name for it. Haunted by demons in the shape of men. They've got me in their grip, and the devil only knows what the outcome will be. But I'll help you escape. Will you come?"

For one instant I was on the point of accepting, but he was a man of questionable reputation, and late auto rides in such company are to be avoided by every young woman. Perhaps he saw the refusal in my face, for he spoke quickly:

"You need not answer now if you want time to think it over, but I'll have my car in the drive below the lodge from sundown till a quarter of twelve. After that——" He paused.

"Yes, after that?" I urged.

"After that I'll have an appointment to sit in council over the disposition of your remains!" And with a cynical smile that held no mirth he turned away in the direction of the village.

CHAPTER NINE

STRANGELY enough, Alwyn's words restored me to calm. His speech had been too dramatic, too passionate, to ring true in this prosaic day. He was trying to frighten me as Ketler had tried. And viewed in the light of cold reason, might not all the gruesome things I had witnessed have been but carefully arranged incidents to scare the cabin's occupants? Not a drop of blood had been spilled, no one had been injured.

And perhaps I need not search far for a motive. That might lie in the boxes and bales which Ketler had placed in the basement—stolen goods, or bootleg whisky. Why had I not thought of such a simple explanation? No wonder he wanted a week in which to remove the stuff. Tomorrow I would investigate, and decide upon a further course of action, but tonight I must find me a place of refuge, for with such lawbreakers about I must not be reckless.

I found the place I sought in a little room that opened off of the service hall. Formerly it might have been a little office for the housekeeper's convenience, for a heavy desk was part of its furnishings. Its one window faced the sea, with sheer cliffs below—nothing could enter there. It had but one door which opened inward—the lock was no trick affair. Carefully I examined the bare, plastered walls—there were no breaks, nothing that suggested the possibility of a secret entrance. I would be safe here. First I carried inside my cot and blankets; next, with a wary eye for in-

truders, I descended to the basement, where I found a stout plank of a length that just suited my purpose. Then I locked the door, dragged the heavy desk against it, and braced the latter with the plank set firmly against the baseboard at the other side of the room. Nothing except a battering-ram could have opened that door from the outer side.

With this thought to cheer me I went to bed. But not to sleep; I could not. For my mind was vexed with that mystery for which I had been able to find no explanation — the footprints that had passed through that solid wall in the basement. For all else that had happened there might be a logical explanation, but not for that. And if walls of masonry were no barrier against the demons that vexed the place, what protection then were the weak plastered walls that guarded me? Had I made a trap for myself? What though I had carefully examined the walls? So likewise had I examined the masonry below and found no signs of an opening. Thus I debated with myself through long hours of dread that grew and grew as the moments sped by. It was eleven o'clock; I heard the clock in the living-room striking. One more hour and then——

But hark! Were the demons even now gathering in advance of the appointed time for an attack upon my stronghold? Did I hear low muttered words, curses, and protestations? Was it a hand that rattled my doorknob? Was it the rising sea wind that shook the door in spite of its buttresses? All, all was still again. Was it the lull in the midst of a storm, a sign of the more furious tempest to follow?

The clock struck the half-hour. What was it that Alwyn had said—that he would wait in the car till a quarter of twelve? Fifteen minutes more in which to escape from the terror that held grim walls of stone no barrier. Vainly I told myself that I was safe; that ghosts had no existence save in the minds of the credulous; that the mischief they did was self-wrung by the victim's imagination. Such argument was vain; the ancient superstition, from which I had believed myself free, came forth to make a mockery of my cold reasoning. In my terror-crazed mind there was but one thought—to leave this trap before it was too late.

Too late? Minutes had gone by since the clock had sounded the half-hour. Had Alwyn gone? Perhaps his car would still be there, and I could drive. With fingers numbed by panic I threw on my clothes. Queerly did my terror-mad brain function. For even as I removed the barriers the sane portion of my mind whispered that if I found the car gone I would have to sleep in the open, and I would need a blanket. So ere I unlocked the door I pulled the heavy army blanket from my cot, folding and rolling it in a neat bundle which I hugged with my left arm as my right hand turned the key.

As the bolt shot back a terror more overwhelming than any I had yet known was upon me. I dare not face what lay outside; I dare not remain till, creeping through the walls, came those awful things with the faces of the dead. Alwyn had spoken of demons in the plural, and two had fought on the stairs; no one could say how many the place held. Sick and half fainting, I clung to the doorknob, praying, not for escape, for I had lost hope, but for strength to meet my doom.

"Cowards die many deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once. From some hidden recess of my mind came that old proverb to inspire me to courage—or rashness. Yes, I was enduring a suffering more torturing than death itself could bring. I had been good; I had held fast to the simple religious faith my parents had taught me; the future world would have in store nothing so horrible as this dread suspense. Better to end all at once than endure the torment longer.

And the clock—not yet had it sounded! Perhaps there was still time for a swift dash along the passage to the hall door before the stroke of midnight set free the demons of darkness. With despairing courage I threw open the door and stepped—sprang, rather—into the passage.

Too late! From the clock came the first stroke of twelve, and framed in the door-

way of the breakfast-room, distinct against the moon-lighted windows beyond, I saw a dark figure, human in outline, one unlifted hand holding a dagger! Towards me it sprang, its arm fell, and I reeled under the impact of the blow that struck me full in the chest!

Shaken, scarcely able to keep my feet, I tottered backward toward the refuge I had just left. But there were dim forms about me, shapes I could scarcely see in the darkness. Hands, horrible clawing hands, clutched at my garments, my arms, with a grip I could not shake off. My doom was upon me, and yet—oh wonderful miracle!—I was no longer afraid. Already I was as one dead, but though these creatures had destroyed my body, that immortal something that is the soul was beyond their reach!

CHAPTER TEN

"HANDS UP!" The sharp command uttered in what was surely a mortal voice, and a flash of light from the lamp overhead brought me back from the verge of the dark world to which I was drifting. That light revealed the brutal-faced men who held me, men whom I had seen about the village, and with these Ketler and Alwyn. Nor was that all, for at the far end of the service hall stood Billy Kidd with a gun in each hand. Nor was he alone, for behind him and in the other doorways that opened on the passage were other men also armed. My friends, whoever they were, had come to my rescue, but too late. Already the blow had fallen.

Yet I was conscious of no pain. Was I beyond all suffering, and my disembodied spirit was but pausing for a moment ere it winged its way to its appointed place? I looked down, half expecting to see my crumpled body lying upon the floor. What was this? Stuck in the blanket which I still held was the dagger I had seen in the haunted chamber. The thick folds had saved me; I was uninjured.

In a daze I saw my enemies manacled and led away, Ketler whining miserably: "Alwyn and I didn't want to hurt the young lady, but the others made us help them. I tried to warn her and scare her away—honest, I did."

"Who are those men? What does it all mean?" The culprits had been taken away, and Billy and I were facing each other in the breakfast-room.

"Counterfeiters. They have a plant in the cellar. We grabbed the whole bunch."

"All but one, a man with a scarred face." But Billy shook his head, smiling at me.

"That was one of our men, the chief of our branch of the Federal service."

"Then why did he chase me?" I asked.

"He followed you, yes; but he was trying to keep you from rushing out and giving the alarm that would betray his presence in the house."

"In the house?"

"Yes. He has been here for some time. Not in the cellar, in the attic."

"The door was locked; but tell me everything," I begged.

"We have been after this gang for months; the principals are old offenders. I don't suppose we will ever find out what hold they had over Ketler and Alwyn, or how they learned the secret of the cellar. But it was an ideal place for their plant, and they made use of the superstition to keep curious folks away."

"You mean they were responsible for all those murders?"

"Not those of long ago, but those of recent date, yes. But to go back to the Chief. He found a clue in the office of the electric power company—a big bill, made out in Ketler's name, for juice used in a deserted house, and decided to investigate. With a skeleton key he gained entrance, but he found nothing. Your arrival perplexed him, but he saw your brother's name on the car, and knowing him slightly, knew you were none of the gang. Perhaps he disturbed you that first night?"

I nodded, and he went on:

"The Chief suspected there was a hidden cellar, but he discovered it only a few minutes before you did, and in exactly the same way. I came that day, according to a pre-arranged plan, and when we were alone

we talked things over. We figured that the first night the cabin was unoccupied they would begin to remove their stuff, and then we would swoop down upon them. So I advertised my departure, though, as you see, I came back with a detachment of our men. But, Miss Wilson, what ever made you come back here after my warning?"

I explained:

"An infernal trap they laid for you. You'll find Mrs. Burt as well as she ever was, though possibly away from home. They probably thought you knew too much, and were determined to put you out of the way. The Chief saw you return, but he did not want to frighten you again by making an appearance. When he saw your preparations for defence he thought you would be safe enough, especially as I was to bring our men at midnight, and he could keep watch till then. What made you come out?"

"It was those footprints in the basement, the ones that went through the solid wall. In comparison my walls seemed no protection, and it was as though I were helplessly trapped."

"Those footprints? They had me guessing also, but the Chief solved the mystery from the inner side. That masonry is just the merest shell on a wooden foundation. Like me, you were looking for a small opening, but it's the whole wall that moves. But don't feel silly over your action, for the gang would have got you in another way. They were preparing smudges to suffocate you when we arrived, not a minute too soon."

"Oh, the beasts! They ought to be shut up for years and years!"

"That's just what will be done," said Billy grimly. Then his mood changed. "Listen, Miss Wilson. Sometimes a person does return from the dead; returns to find the one he loved best has gone from her old haunts, and it is only after a protracted search that he learns she has crossed a continent."

"Billy Kidd, what are you talking about?" I was trembling with an emotion that was not fear.

He smiled, and waved a hand toward the dining-room, then turned and passed out into the service hall, closing the door behind him. But I had no further thought of him. I was staring at the man who stood in the dining-room doorway, a tall young man with a scar across brow and temple. When I had seen that mark before I had thought it a hideous thing, but now it was almost beautiful, for beneath it looked out the kind, loving eyes of Dick Hayden, my lover of long ago. For me had the dead gloriously returned.

The rest is soon told. The leading counterfeiters received long sentences, Ketler and Alwyn shorter ones. Alwyn Lodge? Once its mystery was cleared up Sanford realized his dream of disposing of it for a substantial sum. Today it is a most charming little inn under the management of the syndicate which controls the Springs. Often do Dick and I form part of the gay throng that crowds its ballroom, whose decorations I regard as my supreme work of art.

We are married now, Dick and I, and what time he is not busy sleuthing for Uncle Sam we make our home at the Springs in the pretty bungalow that was formerly Mrs. Burt's. That bungalow was a wedding present to me from Sanford, though often he insists that it was no gift, but my due reward for the part I played in laying forever the ghosts of Alwyn Lodge.

(*The End.*)

POLICE GET PHYSICAL CULTURE

THE police of Los Angeles are being put through a course in physical culture by Capt. Walter Yant, former physical director of the 91st Division at Camp Lewis.

Explaining the need for the course, Captain Yant said: "Very few policemen can run three blocks or even two. Few can go up or down a rope. Having big muscles and being able to lift heavy weights are not physical fitness. Some officers don't know how to stand. Many don't know how to breathe."

The Tale the Skeleton Told

By GLENN G. GRAVATT

THIS weird, fantastic story is so strange as to be almost unbelievable. A grinning skeleton told it to me. You will say I am mad, but I am absolutely sane. Ha! Ha! We sat on the top of a high mountain, the skeleton and I, and laughed and talked, and drank a glass of wine. While I tightly clasped the cold, bony fingers of the man long dead, his fleshless lips poured into my ears this terrible tale. And all the while we laughed, and the gods laughed, and the spirits wept and moaned and sighed.

It was the hour of the night when a man's blood runs cold, the witching hour when one starts at his own footsteps. Owls hooted eerily in the trees, and bats winged their way, phantom-like, across the moon. Slim Smith, alias The Grey Mouse, slunk cautiously through a dark, deserted street, as silently as his own shadow. In front of a small shop in the outlying district of the city he paused and critically surveyed the reflection of himself in the mirrored window-pane. A gleam of yellowish light was cast by a nearby arc.

There he saw a gaunt spectre with sunken cheeks and tiny eyes that stared out of great black cavities. The pasty skin was drawn over the bony framework of his ugly face like a loose drumhead. He twisted his mouth into a distorted grin, then sneered horribly at the reflection of himself, and slouched on down the street where it was darker. The Grey Mouse felt uneasy beneath the beams of the street lamp.

The early morning air was damp and chilly, and a low fog gathering. He turned up the collar of his dilapidated coat around the skinny parchment of his neck and held it there with his claw-like talons. With his other hand he clutched a piece of heavy lead pipe he had picked up half an hour earlier from the gutter. Dame Fortune had directed his footsteps to this spot. There he had pounced upon the lead like an eagle descending upon its prey, for it was a weapon that would gather him much gold. He kissed the bludgeon lovingly and fondled it tenderly.

As the Grey Mouse crept on through the inky darkness shivering, and his teeth chattering with the cold, he became aware of the gnawing pangs of hunger. Yet this bothered him little. The real hunger, the hunger that tortured his aching body with a thousand pains, was his intense desire for cocaine—just one little shot of "dope." He had taken none for several hours, and was almost frantic. Hopefully he sniffed the back of his hand, but there was no "snow" there. He cursed violently to himself.

Suddenly he pricked up his withered ears. Footsteps! Perhaps the devil had sent him a victim. It meant food and drugs. Cunningly he crouched back in the sheltering mouthway of an alley and raised the piece of lead pipe above his head.

The wayfarer without thought of danger tramped noisily along the sidewalk, the short, staccato beat of his footsteps sounding loudly in the stillness. The Grey Mouse, his shrewd eyes blazing, watched the man approach, saw him come even with him, and let him go on one step past.

Then he brought the heavy lead pipe down. There was a smothered shriek of anguish, followed by a low, pitiful moan, as the man sank in a heap on the pavement.

The Mouse bent over the lifeless body and searched through all his victim's pockets. Then he swore. The man had not a cent. There were no rings on his fingers,

not even a watch in his vest. Visions of the soothing "dope" and of the warm breakfast he had planned vanished.

"So you tricked me, eh? Made me half-kill you, and then didn't have a penny to pay me for my trouble," were the unreasonable words he ground out furiously. Then he sidled off down the street.

Before a palatial mansion looming up amid dark clumps of shrubbery he paused, wonderingly. The place had a promising appearance, and a vine-clad lattice-work at the side of the house gave ready access to the French windows on the second floor.

After a moment's hesitation he drew himself over the cold stone fence and worked his way through a grove of trees in the front yard around to the side of the house. He placed one foot on the latticework and found it firm. Slowly he climbed up. On the portico above he rested for a second; then, reaching under the screen, he found the latch and turned it. The window swung open. Without a sound he crawled in on his hands and knees. Once inside, he stood upright and peered about.

A shaft of moonlight, soft and luminous, enabled him to see that the four walls were literally covered with rare paintings of old masters, ancient works of art, Egyptian pottery and all sorts of antiques for which he had no name in his limited vocabulary. Over here was a hat once worn by Napoleon, and over there a sword once used by the Duke of Buckingham. Valuable, perhaps, but of no use to him. What he was after was money.

Suddenly he perceived a wall-safe. Ah, that was what he wanted! He sprang savagely toward the safe and turned the knob. The combination had not been set, for the safe door opened easily.

Snatching up from the floor an empty box that had evidently housed at one time some of the treasures of the art collector or connoisseur who inhabited the place, he filled it with the pearls, diamonds and crisp currency his dirty claws scooped from the safe. Then he darted for the window through which he had entered. As he did so a door was opened, and a tall man in a dressing-gown, his fingers gripping the handle of an automatic, stood silhouetted in the doorway.

The Grey Mouse was riveted in his tracks. The box dropped from his nervous hands, and he turned, ready to fly, his twisted lips parted and his yellow teeth bared like the fangs of a wolf. The art collector pulled the trigger of his gun. Instantly a flash of flame split the darkness. The Mouse heard the whiz of a bullet past his ear, and the shattering of glass as the missile penetrated the window behind him.

With a leap like a tiger that carried him half-way across the room, he threw himself fiercely on the gentleman, his fingers clutching at the other's throat. The two went down in a rolling, misshapen heap. Then his crooked, withered fingers found the object for which they sought, and he pressed tightly, his long, dirty fingernails digging painfully into the man's neck. The art collector's arms stiffened, then relaxed, and lost their hold around the burglar's waist. Fearful lest others be aroused by the noise, he dashed again for the window.

In his haste to escape he failed to notice that the box he had dropped had fallen beside another box on the floor almost identical in size and shape with the first, and that instead of picking up that which contained the money and jewelry, he seized its companion.

As he reached the balcony he gave a sidelong glance over his shoulder and saw that the man on the floor was stirring. There was not a moment to lose. Placing one hand on the railing of the balcony, he vaulted over and dropped ten feet, where finally his shoes hit the soft turf and he sprawled full length upon the damp ground. Rising, he was off and away on the wings of the wind, the precious box clasped tightly under his arm.

For several blocks he ran, then slowed down to a walk, meanwhile regaining his breath. He had put a distance between himself and the house. He felt safe now. He breathed easier and his hopes rose. Visions of the powdery white stuff so relieving to the tortures of a drug addict grew more real. There would be no disappointment this time.

When he arrived at his dirty, ill-smelling hut down by the waterfront he locked the door, turned on the light and sat down on his bunk. Then removing the lid of the box he turned it upside-down. He was stupefied. He almost tumbled over backward in his amazement. Instead of the dazzling array of jewels and the wad of green and brown currency he had expected to see, there rolled from the box a ghastly human skull!

For a moment The Grey Mouse was awed. The eyeless sockets of this terrible thing seemed to be staring at him accusingly. Then reason told him that this was only another article collected by the connoisseur, and that, during the flight he had carelessly picked up the wrong box.

He set the box on the floor in front of him, placing the skull on top of it. Meanwhile he slowly deciphered a little printed slip that had fluttered out of the skull. The slip read:

"This is Cagliostro's skull. Cagliostro was the arch-necromancer of the eighteenth century, a magician and a socerer. He manufactured elixirs of life, raised the shades of the illustrious dead, told fortunes, predicted lucky lottery numbers, made gold out of lead and founded occult lodges of Egyption Masonry. In company with a Greek, Althotas, he visited Egypt, Arabia and Persia, and studied alchemy at Malta in the laboratory of Pinto, the Grand Master. At Rome he married beautiful Lorenza Feliciani. They traveled over Europe in a coach-and-four with servants garbed in gorgeous liveries, and scattered money right and left. He claimed to be several thousand years old, declaring solemnly that he had hobnobbed with Alexander and Julius Ceasar, and that he was present at the burning of Rome under Nero. All Paris went wild over the enchanter and thronged to his magical soirees at his residence in the Rue St. Claude. He had no resources, yet lived in luxury. He treated and cured the poor without pay, and not satisfied with restoring their health, made them large presents of money. He spoke a strange Arabic gibberish. His ceremonies were weird and impressive. His seance room was hung with somber draperies and illuminated with wax lights in massive silver candlesticks which were arranged about his apartment in mystic triangles and pentagons. He made one remarkable prediction—the fall of the Bastille. He was finally condemned by the Pope to perpetual imprisonment in the gloomy fortress of San Leon, Urbino, where his death occured in 1790."

The Grey Mouse cast the printed slip aside. The tiresome history of Cagliostro held little fascination for him. It mattered little whether the skull in front of him was that of a sleight-of-hand performer or some one else. Cocaine! Just one little sniff! That was what he wanted.

Suddenly, and with soul-shaking unexpectedness, there came an uncanny, ghostly sound that made him sit upright, trembling and terrified. He heard a hideous laughing, the fiendish chuckling of a madman! There was no doubt about it. The diabolical sounds were coming from the mouth of the skull!

The Grey Mouse, naturally a coward, at this awe-inspiring demonstration of the supernatural, sat on his bunk dumfounded, paralyzed with fear, his eyes drawn against their will to the frightful thing on the floor. Then a dreadful voice, low but firm—a voice that made his flesh creep and his hair stand on end—issued from the very lips of the death's head:

"You murderer! You robber! You are doomed to die. There is no hope in heaven or hell for you!"

The Mouse, quivering and his teeth chattering, went pale, and he fell back against the wall in terror. Cold sweat stood out on his brow. The skull was speaking. Once more came the infernal, demoniacal voice:

"Murderer! Robber! You have killed a man. You have robbed a home and almost killed the owner! I know where you are and I'm going to get you. Understand? Get you! Get you!"

The shivering Mouse, unable to breathe, and his heart throbbing violently, reeled

dizzily in the corner. This was no drug dream. He had used no dope for hours. The ghostly voice was unmistakably coming from the mouth of the skull. Yes, he was doomed. This was the end. He felt it. Presently the sorcerer's head was speaking again:

"There is just one hope for you now. If you don't want to be stricken like a dog, if you want to throw yourself upon man's mercy, return the skull to the home whence you stole it."

There was no time to be lost. Better by far the jail and the hangsman's noose than the inevitable far-reaching clutches of the supernatural from which there was no escape. The Grey Mouse, still shaking, fingered the skull gingerly and dropped it into its box. Then he clapped on the lid in the fear that it might leap out.

Pulling his shapeless cap over his face, he hurried off with a shambling gait in the direction of the art collector's home. Presently he stood before its grilled iron gate. This time the house was lighted. The gate was unlocked. He swung it inward and slunk up the driveway to the front door, which was also unlocked. He entered and immediately found himself between two men, one of whom he recognized as the man in the dressing-gown with whom he had fought. Both held revolvers.

One of the men locked him in a closet. Then he heard them telephone for the police. The panic-stricken Mouse heaved a sigh of relief. The authorities, at any rate, were human beings, not ghastly, grinning skulls. Next he heard the two men talking.

"You see," the art collector was saying, "I have an amateur radio broadcasting station in my home. The skull is a scientific experiment on which I have been working. It contains a small wireless receiving set, aerial and loud-speaker. It is tuned to respond to the wave of my broadcasting set. Just after the skull was stolen the police notified me that a man was found dead just down the street a block, with a piece of lead pipe at his feet. I surmised that the same crook had pulled both jobs, and when I revived I began broadcasting. The set in the skull caught my words and scared him into returning the skull."

The Grey Mouse wondered when the cops would arrive. The uninteresting jumble of words outside meant nothing to him. He couldn't understand it. What was a radio, anyway?

And this is the story of the grinning skeleton told me as we sat on the top of the mountain and drank our cup of wine. And I know it is true because the skeleton is Slim Smith, alias The Grey Mouse. He showed me where the bones of his neck had been broken by the hangsman's noose. And yet they say I am mad. Ha! Ha!

GETS THREATS THROUGH MAILS

CHICAGO detectives and postal authorities who spent the day investigating threatening letters recently to wealthy Chicogoans were undecided whether the missives were the work of cranks with a perverted sense of humor or a band of extortionates bent on capitalizing the kidnaping and slaying of Robert Franks to frighten wealthy persons into meeting their demands.

One of the letters was received by Edward Hines, wealthy lumberman, from a man who signed the missive "Farewell" and called upon the recipient to bury $20,000 under an ash pile at a designated point or forfeit his life. Numerous warnings were interspersed with bits of poetry and philosophic musings.

Another letter, neatly typewritten, was received by Dr. Homer S. Warren, the writers signing themselves "The Red Peppers," and demanding $5,000 under threat of "exposure."

Shadowed

By HUGH THOMASON

STILSON came by way of the garden, after the shadows of night had fallen. It was rainy, windy and dark, just the kind of night that suited the work he had in hand. He had been waiting in the angle of a wall for over two hours. This man was careful, and was not given to making mistakes.

Being of a tidy and methodical turn of mind, Stilson killed the old man and then looked around for his money. He wore rubber gloves, the same kind that surgeons use when performing a major operation. They left no telltale fingerprints. And he wore arctic overshoes, for the night was wet and his shoe-prints on the soil of the garden were to be avoided.

When the clock at Fire Department Headquarters had struck the last note of eleven, Stilson had tucked the money safely away into an inner pocket and was treading down the stairs to the window, highly delighted with himself.

He opened the window and climbed out, closed the sash gently, hurried across the garden, dropped the arctics from his shoes, and peeped through the gates. Not a person stirred anywhere. Not a sound was heard but the dropping of the rain. The street was deserted, as he knew very well it would be. And the policeman was not due for half an hour yet. The thing had been very well done. But then Stilson was a very careful man.

He walked to the end of the street silently and swiftly, turned to the right and soon turned again, also a third time. When he came to the dark streets lined with stores he smiled.

Safe!

He stood still and listened. "Schuff-schuff! Schuff-schuff!" Footsteps!

The wind was against him, and it was not easy to hear. But, surely——

The folly of standing in an attitude of listening was plain. Calmly Stilson began to hum a tune and fumble in his pockets. Yes, footsteps, sure enough. "Schuff-schuff! Schuff-schuff!" Not very aristocratic footsteps, either. Oh, well——

The criminal took a cigar from his pocket and bit the end off in a savage manner, but kept a tune humming all the time. He struck a match and made pretense that the wind had extinguished it; so he struck several more, and half a minute passed. When the footsteps were near Stilson turned and struck another match, cupping it with his hand. His own face was shaded, but the light was thrown dimly on a man who slunk furtively past like a shadow.

He was not a handsome man, by any means, the fugitive shadow, judging by what you could see of him. But you could not see a lot.

His collar was up and his hat was down. There was a hint of staring eyes; but they did not seem to stare at Stilson. Why should they? Stilson asked himself.

The match flared up and died out. Stilson did not move for a moment, but stood with eyes on the retreating shadowy figure. The man did not slacken his pace, but walked on with the same dull shuffling tread, never glancing back, and going as if Stilson did not exist, and was not standing there watching him.

Stilson smiled, puffed twice or thrice at his cigar, and then took his eyes off the vanishing shadow.

"Some night workman, eh?" he murmured. "Or a tramp. A rotten night for him!"

He listened a moment longer, heard noth-

ing, puffed again at his cigar, then he set his shoulders back squarely, crossed the street and went on his way on the other side, humming the cheerful tune all the time to show that he of all men had nothing whatever to be ashamed or afraid of. Indeed, he decided should he meet up with a policeman he would wish the cop good-night and make some pleasant comment on the weather. He might even stop to chat a little while and give the officer a cigar. Why not? Nobody knew what he had done.

As Stilson passed on his way the shadowy man crept out of the deeper shadows of a doorway and passed on his way, too, treading softly and keeping to the side of the street where there were no lights. He had the eyes of one who looks and will find what he seeks.

Stilson was quite gay of heart at his success. He had gone the right way about things, and had nothing to fear simply because he had left nothing to chance. Seven weeks had gone since the tip first came to him, but he had not hurried. The race was not to be lost for a nail, nor the ship for an ounce of tar. He put in time learning a lot of things he had not known before.

He had found that you can stand on your head and sing a lullaby in the dark street, or do anything else you like, if you first take the precaution of doing it after half-past ten at night and stop doing it before midnight, which is the policeman's time. He found that the dark street was unlighted except by one lamp at the end, far from the gate of the old man's house. He found, by careful study of crooks' methods, that if the man is old enough, and hasn't the least idea of what is going to happen, you have only to get him by the nape of the neck, and the thing's over in a second without a sound, leaving no clues behind. And he studied the streets and learned of dark ways, back streets and railway bridges and streets where the light was obscured by leaves. All useful things to know.

Stilson was an unseeable sort of man, neither short nor tall, slim nor short, dark nor fair. You could not have said that he looked wealthy; but you could not have said that he looked poor. There were none of the little things about Stilson—none of the little touches that you seize upon when you identify a man. The one who would swear to anything in his case most certainly had his work cut out.

Stilson chuckled at the sureness of his plans as he walked along a straight and empty street. A thousand stinging arrows of rain could not lessen his elation nor dampen his enthusiasm for himself. A bright lad, Stilson, and well did he know it.

But listen!

He drew closer to the wall and stopped bare. Was it Schuff-schuff? Was it?

He turned now and looked back, but saw nothing. Could it have been? Listen! No.

He hurried on, humming no longer, cursing the wind and listening when he could in the short lulls. He bit savagely at his cigar, and the fingertips in his pockets nervously tapped out unmeaning tunes on the lining.

No sense in getting funky. That was the beauty of the whole scheme—nobody knew. In all of seven weeks he had not mentioned the project to a soul, and he was not one to chatter in his sleep. He had made no map, had committed nothing to paper, never approached a possible confederate. He was absolutely alone in the matter, and suspicion was impossible.

The police had been far away at the time; he had not used a light; the street had been deserted when he arrived and deserted when he left. No flaw was possible. Nobody could suspect what nobody knew was going to happen. And nobody did know in this case. That was the beauty of the whole affair.

Then that regular shuffle of feet—pat-pat—smote his ears again.

"Ha!" Stilson swung around suddenly and stopped again. "Curse the wind! Was it the sound of feet? And where?"

There was no one in sight. A long line of wet pavement stretched behind for several hundred yards, lighted up in little spots at intervals, and it was empty. And then he glanced across the street and thought he saw a shadow creeping by the wall.

Where his hat pressed was a burning band. One hand in his pocket strummed

still, and dampty, the senseless tune that he had hummed before. With the other he took from between his teeth the cigar and spat out the broken leaf that he had bitten in his agitation.

And across the road, slinking down the wall, staring before him and never looking once at Stilson, was the same man, the same silent man—the shadow!

Stilson cast about for a flaw, but there was none.

The shadow slunk along and was gone.

No echo of its slurring footsteps came from the windward. Stilson turned his ear and waited. Then he turned and retraced his steps with his best speed short of a suspicion-inviting run.

Five minutes on his way many short streets invited him to the right. Stilson turned into the first of them, then stopped and waited, with his eye to the wall corner.

A long time passed by, and then, cut by the ceaseless patter of falling raindrops, was heard the terrible sound again, the soft shuffle of feet that took the heat from Stilson's face and sent it driving to his shaking hands. Unable to believe that anything could have miscarried in his scheme, he peeped again around the wall in terror at what he might see, but unable to think that he should see it.

At first he only heard, "Schuff-schuff! Schuff-schuff!" The slur of careless feet coming nearer and nearer, but nothing seen. And then Stilson's heart kicked and began racing. Here was the shadow! Not twenty yards away, and at this side of the street! It had crossed, and was returning.

Stilson stopped thinking of the infallibility of schemes. He hesitated long enough to discard the notion of a flight, and then turned and fled down the short street. His running feet made soft sounds in the night, but this was no time for silence. He ran yet faster, pitting the strength of his legs against the shadow's hearing.

He ran the length of a dozen houses, and then stopped with a high brick wall before him. When he saw what it was, and had glanced to the right and left for some opening, his heart seemed to jump up into his mouth.

A *cul-de-sac!*

Listen! Yes, the shadow was after him! The "pat-pat-pat" was slurring nearer down the street.

Full in the street-lamp's light Stilson sprang for the wall and clambered up. He balanced on the top long enough to see the shadow behind come hurrying into the light, and then he dropped over. Even as he dropped he heard the scraping of stubby shoes over the wall behind.

He seemed to be in some public grounds or small park. There were benches about, and once he ran into a signboard. When he came to a clear path he sniggered in his fright and prayed that the shadow might be lost forever in the trees.

He looked back and saw the black mass of the shadow sitting on the wall, head bent intently forward, peering into the gloom. As noiselessly as he could he tiptoed away and followed the path until he came to a railing with a high bank behind it. He clambered over the railing and then listened once more. The shadow could be following now. He had come so gently, and what slight sound he may have made must have been lost to the shadow in the sound of his own pursuing tread. And it was so dark. He could not be seen. It was not possible that he could be seen.

Then again came that regular shuffling step.

Stilson had another spell of palpitation of the heart and went hurrying up the slope. This was no man that pursued—this shadow! Here was a fiend—some shape of another world—that saw where nothing could be seen. Something that knew what men knew not.

The thick and ghastly sound was nearer when Stilson came to the top of the bank. He threw off pretense now and galloped like a maddened horse. At the top of the bank was a railroad, and Stilson flew along it, leaping from tie to tie, until he reached a low stone parapet on his right. He sprang from the line here, and gripped the stone and peeped below. There was a ten-foot drop to the street, but behind was the pursuing shadow—the thing that saw when men's eyes saw nothing; the thing that

knew! Here was no time for fastidious choice.

Stilson swung over the parapet, kept clear, and fell upon his feet. He did not look above. He turned on his heel and sprang through the arch. And before the scraping of feet announced the arrival of the shadow behind Stilson's wrist was tight in the clutches of the law.

"Come out!" growled the representative of law and order, dragging Stilson into the light. The shadow hung around near, aimlessly and silent.

"Come clean, now; what's it all about?" asked the policeman.

Stilson, knees and hands shaking audibly, slunk back from the shadow's touch.

"He lies—whatever he says!" he gasped.

"Who does?" demanded the policeman. "What about it?"

Then the shadow spoke.

"Nothin' to do wid me, Cap'n. But this guy tried to keep out of me way, so I thought I'd see it to a finish. I followed him all the way from——"

"Both of you'll have to come along," said the officer. "Men don't run about like this at midnight for nothing."

"Don't you do no worryin' for me," said the shadow. "My record's clear."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the policeman. "Well, we'll see about your record when we get to the station. Also, we'll see about your pockets right now. Stick 'em up!"

"Half a second, Cap'n," said the shadow, a tramp, stooping quickly. "I don't mind goin'—not in the least. But I ain't goin' without wot I came for."

He took up the cigar butt that had fallen from Stilson's nerveless lips and stuck it between his yellow teeth.

"Now then, Cap'n," he said, "lead on."

LOOT IS RECOVERED

IN connection with the theft of securities worth $10,000 from a safe in the home of George Baird, millionaire president of the Citizens' National Bank of Oneonta, N. Y., on June 2 last, Arthur Bainton, 23 years old, and James Sawyer, 31 years old, are locked up at Police Headquarters.

Bainton and Sawyer were arrested at Lexington avenue and Eighty-eighth street after midnight as the result of a visit to this city by Chief of Police Frank N. Horton of Oneonta and Under Sheriff Don Rose of Otsego county, following statements made by a man arrested in Providence, R. I.

The men were arrested by Detectives Edward Kaubfleish and Pierce Flemming of the Old Slip station, who said they found $143,000 worth of securities in Bainton's room.

The safe in Mr. Baird's home was opened by some one who knew or solved the combination. There was no clue to the burglary until the Providence, R. I., police arrested a man who described himself as Jackson De Forest. The Providence police said De Forest was arrested in the act of committing a burglary, and in his room was found $17,000 worth of securities stolen from Mr. Baird's home.

De Forest is said to have made a statement to the police as a result of which Chief of Police Horton and Under Sheriff Rore were notified and hurried to New York City. They were informed the remainder of the loot might be found here in the possession of Bainton and Sawyer.

Detectives Kaubfleish and Flemming, accompanied by Horton and Rose, had been on the lookout for Bainton and Sawyer, while Bainton's room was kept under police surveillance at all times.

Bainton and Sawyer were walking at Lexington avenue and Eighty-eighth street when they were overtaken by the detectives. They refused to tell how they had come into possession of the $143,000 worth of securities found in Bainton's room.

Time and the Law

By HORATIO VERNON ELLIS

CHIEF MULLIN sat before his desk, a long black cigar between his lips. He was a large, broad-shouldered man of a race that can be found on most any city's police force. He was not one who could lay claim to extraordinary powers of deduction; but, nevertheless, he was shrewd, a good reasoner along his chosen line, and above all, he was experienced and masterful.

Hunching his two hundred pounds of hard bone and muscle more comfortably in his swivel chair, he let his keen, blue eyes wander to the window where outside in the fast-gathering twilight men and women hurried past.

A sudden sharp knock on his office door made him swing around, and his gruff but pleasing voice called, "Come in!"

The door swung inward and a man whom the Chief judged to be in his forties entered, followed by the desk lieutenant.

"Captain, this is Mr. Hargrave. He's got a rather queer story," explained the lieutenant.

"All right, Tom, thanks," said the Chief. The lieutenant, nodding to Hargrave, turned and left the room.

"Sit down, Mr. Hargrave," invited Mullin, motioning towards a chair, his keen eyes noting the obvious respectability and self-contained excitement of his visitor.

Mr. Hargrave in a physical way was insignificant compared to the stalwart official who sat facing him across the desk. Just now his thin, intelligent face had considerable color, and he was plainly nervous, probably because of the place in which he found himself and because of the business which had brought him there.

Like many others, Hargrave had little faith in the ordinary police, except for strong-arm work. He would not have come to the station in this way except that he was in a great hurry, and was filled with a despair that made him almost sick.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Hargrave?" asked Mullin.

"I'm an expert in stones—an appraiser, a matcher and an engraver. I work for Jurgens & Howe."

"Hayden Square?"

"Yes."

"Lost any stones?"

"Yes, fifty-seven diamonds and about sixty-five perfect pearls."

"Phew!" ejaculated Mullin, sitting bolt upright with a jerk, his face showing keen interest.

"I live at the Hampshire Arms, and I do most of my work there. I had all the precious stones in my room this afternoon and left them there on my desk when I went out to dinner about six-fifteen."

"How long were you away?" asked Mullin.

"Less than an hour, sir; and when I got back they were all gone except seven diamonds."

"All but seven diamonds!" The Chief was leaning far forward gazing into the face of the expect, weighing every word. "Go on, Mr. Hargrave."

"I put the seven diamonds in my wallet and came here. That's all I can tell you," declared the gem expert.

Mullin glanced at the clock on the wall. It registed 7:22. Hargrave had certainly hurried, considering the fact that he had told his story twice in detail.

"How much is the stuff valued at, Mr. Hargrave?"

"Somewhere around fifty or sixty thousand dollars," replied the appraiser, fidgit-

ing in his chair. The Chief's coolness seemed to irritate him.

"All but seven. Hem! That's funny," grunted Mullin, gazing through the window, conscious of the other's uneasiness, but ignoring it. The expert's statement about the worth of the jewels made it clear that the robbery was a prearranged affair.

Inwardly Hargrave cursed himself for his foolishness in coming to the police station instead of seeking some private detective agency where he thought he could find better brains and get quicker action.

"Who knew you had the stones, Mr. Hargrave?" abruptly asked the Chief.

"Mr. Jurgens."

"Any one else?"

"Well, possible two or three."

"How long was it known that you were to take the stones home on this particular day?"

"I do not know how long any one else knew that I was to take the stones home, but I do know that I did not know myself until an hour before I took them," answered the much worried expert. "Do you think it possible to find out anything? This will ruin me," the words were wrung from him in an agony of distress.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Hargrave," replied Mullin with real sympathy for the man. "I'll do the best I can, and just as quick as I can, but you must understand that it is imperative that I know these things."

"Yes, I know, sir, but they'll be getting away with them in the meantime."

"Right you are, Mr. Hargrave," admitted Mullin, studying him covertly, "but we can do nothing to stop them—that is, for the present at least. Why did you say 'they?' "

The question was put with a lightning-like thrust.

"Why, I—I—I—don't know; no—no particular reason that I know of," stammered the little expert.

"Well," rejoined the Chief good-humoredly, "that's a rather common error made in speech nowadays, and it's a very natural expression, I guess."

Rising to his full six-foot-two, Mullin touched a buzzer on the corner of his desk.

Almost immediately the desk lieutenant appeared in the doorway in response to the ring.

"Tom," said the Chief, "have Henry get out my car. I'm going down to the Hampshire Arms with Mr. Hargrave."

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, and, spinning on his heel, he disappeared.

Mullin led the way down the hallway and out into the rear courtyard, where a high-powered roadster was waiting. In five minutes they arrived at the Hampshire Arms, a family hotel with a modest electric sign that projected out over the sidewalk.

They entered the elevator and went up four flights. Hargrave unlocked the third door on the right, switched on the light and invited the Chief to come in.

Mullin entered and closed the door. Slowly his eyes traveled around the room. It was large and well furnished; brass bed, easy chairs, dressing-table and several cases of books—a typical bachelor apartment.

There were only two windows in the room. Before one of them there was a neat flat desk with numerous tools of a delicate design, all set out in an orderly fashion. Both windows were open, pulled down from the top; both shades were also drawn down as far as they would come.

Mullin turned and looked towards the door. There was no transom.

"Sure you locked the door?" he asked.

"Absolutely," returned Hargrave.

The Chief nodded. Crossing over to the unobstructed window, he put up the shade, raised the sash and leaned far outward.

Hargrave's windows were in a sheer wall. The wall across the court was at least fifty feet away, and the nearest fire-escape was an oblique flight of iron steps probably a distance of some twenty feet.

"Been any painting or repairing at this end of the building today, inside or out?" asked Mullin.

"No. At least I think not. I was in all afternoon."

"Any one come into your room while you were here? I mean with your permission, of course?"

"No, sir."

"Tell anybody of your loss?"

"Lord, no! As soon as I was sure that they were gone I went down to your station."

"Great!" exclaimed the Chief with considerable satisfaction. "By the way, Mr. Hargrave, did you pull the window blinds down before you went out to supper?"

"No; it was almost dark when I went out and I did not think it necessary."

"Hem!" muttered Mullin. "Do you suppose the hotel manager is in?"

"He might be."

"Well, I want to see him," declared the burly official. "You just wait here until I get back. Won't be gone long."

Hargrave with a sickly grin nodded as the Chief passed out of the room. Slowly Hargrave sat down in one of his big easy chairs, his limp figure and drawn, haggard face showing plainly the despair that was in his heart. His head in his hands, he listened to the heavy tread as it died away down the hall.

"God!" he groaned. "I'm ruined; and—maybe—maybe I will be suspected!" At this thought he lifted his head and gazed wildly about the room, a terrible fear shining in his staring eyes.

"Suppose they do—suspect? What could I do?"

While Hargrave sat in torment, self-inflicted, Mullin, grinning delightedly, went down in the elevator to the office and made known his desire to see the manager.

It happened that Mr. Murray, the manager, was in, and Mullin disclosed his calling, which, however, Murray knew before he was told, and his reason for being present.

"I didn't know there was anything wrong, Mr. Mullin," said the manager, very much troubled. "What can I do for you? Command me, of course."

"Take me to the room just over the one occupied by Mr. Hargrave," said the Chief.

"It's rather hard on Mr. Hargrave," commented the manager, as they went up to the fifth floor. "He's been with us here for ten years, and never any trouble."

"There always has to be a first time," asserted Mullin, as they went down the hallway, stopping before a door on the right side of the hall.

The apartment was occupied by a Mrs. Wallace, a young, good-looking widow, who allowed them to enter at once.

"Were you in all afternoon, Mrs. Wallace?" asked the Chief, getting down to business at once.

"Why, no. I left at half-past five and just returned about ten minutes ago," replied the lady, looking from one to the other somewhat alarmed.

"Lock your door when you went out?"

"No. I left it open and told Gus to lock it when he was through."

The rooms are cleaned every day, Mr. Mullin," explained the manager, with a touch of pride. "Gus is the houseman."

With a nod of understanding, Mullin went across the room to the two windows, which were like those in Hargrave's room and directly over them. He threw up the shades of the right-hand window, then pushed up the sash. He peered out and down at Hargrave's bright window, and could see part of the working desk in the expert's room. Seeming satisfied, he drew back into the room and knelt down, scrutinizing the window-sill; bending still lower, he carefully examined the floor beneath the window. Brushing his hand over the floor, he held it up and looked at it; then with a little movement as though discarding something he arose.

"That's all, lady," he said. "Thank you."

With a grim smile of satisfaction he turned to the manager:

"Let's go down, Mr. Murray," he suggested. "By the way," queried the Chief as they made the descent in the elevator, "who is Gus?"

"The houseman."

"In now?"

The manager looked at his watch.

"It's 8:31. I believe he stays until nine."

Re-entering the manager's office, Mr. Murray at the Chief's request telephoned down to the basement for Gus.

In about five minutes Gus Ferris, a tall, rather intelligent, though rough-looking fellow, came into the office, seeming not at all

embarrassed when he saw the big man with Mr. Murray.

"Ring for me, Mr. Murray?" he asked.

"This is Gus?" asked the Chief pleasantly as he rose from his chair.

"Yes," returned the manager.

Without a further word Mullin stepped across the room and placed his hand on the houseman's shoulder; then with a speed and accuracy that were remarkable, he whipped out a pair of handcuffs and had them on the fellow's wrists before that individual could guess his purpose.

"What the h— d'ye mean?" profanely cried Gus, struggling without avail.

"I want to ask you a few questions, that's what," replied Mullin, with a mirthless laugh. "Come on along with me."

Linking his arm in that of the houseman's they went to the elevator, accompanied by the amazed Murray. Reaching the fourth floor, they went down the hall to Hargrave's room.

The little expert's mouth fell open and his eyes blinked as he beheld the trio walking in upon him.

"We were in luck, Mr. Hargrave," declared Mullin cheerfully. "It's a wonder Gus here didn't light out. Evidently thought he was safe, though."

"Got any pals, Gus?" inquired the Chief, with a grin.

"No," growled the man. "Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"Got the stuff on you?" asked the big official pleasantly.

At this query Gus became profane, and still more so when Mullin searched him.

"Ah!" cried the Chief delightedly, as he brought out a wallet from the man's inside vest pocket with suspicious protuberances. He handed the wallet to Hargrave and waited, a broad smile on his face. Mullin was in a very pleasant frame of mind, and believed he had a right to be.

Stepping over to his desk, Hargrave opened the lumpy wallet. In a glittering, sparkling mass the precious baubles rolled out onto the desk.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Hargrave in devout gratitude. "They are all here. Thank God!" he repeated.

"How was it done, and how did you know who did it?" asked Murray, looking at the smiling Mullin with great admiration.

"Why," explained the Chief, in a matter-of-fact way, "Gus here took the metal sweep off of the vacuum pipe, stuck the pipe down through Mr. Hargrave's open window and let it go around on his desk sucking up all but seven diamonds. He probably saw that you had the stones on the desk. He figured that no one would see him let the pipe down from Mrs. Wallace's window in the dusk, and if they did nothing would be thought about it as being out of the ordinary. You will find some little new scratches on your desk, Mr. Hargrave, and you, Mr. Murray, will also find some of these scratches on the window-sill in Mrs. Wallace's room; there is also some dust on the floor beneath the window which dropped out of the pipe when Gus here disconnected the sweep. You see, it was the only way I could figure out anybody could do the job and, besides—well, it's been done before."

Hargrave finally broke the ensuing silence by warmly thanking the Chief and praising him for his acumen.

"It may be," said Mullin, "that Gus had some one in your place who told him that you were to have the stones here at your room; but we'll find that out later."

The Chief led Gus out of the room; Murray followed.

Hargrave locked his room door and sank wearily into a big chair, gazing at the handful of precious stones. His grief had so suddenly changed that he almost wept for joy.

Suddenly the heavy footsteps of the Chief were lost in the silence. Hargrave took out his watch. It was just five minutes past nine!

The Last Trick

By CARL GARRET HODGES

THE hall was as dark and silent as a tomb. A slight click as a key was inserted in the outer door. A draft of damp wind as the door opened to silhouette a figure against the murky darkness of the night. The door shut slowly with only one squeak from a faulty hinge. The silent figure stood motionless for a fleeting instant, and then padded quickly over the carpeted floor to the staircase that disappeared upwards in the half-darkness. A hand went into his hip pocket and emerged with an object that glinted evilly. Walking slowly, testing each step before he threw his weight upon it, he made careful progress up the stairs. At the top he paused for an instant to look around. The long hall that ran the entire length of the house was quiet and dark, except for a faint light that showed beneath a door at the farther end. The figure drew a sharp breath as it saw the light, and began to walk silently toward it.

Suddenly he felt the hard, cold muzzle of an automatic between his ribs. Instinctively he raised his arms above his head. A low voice sounded behind him in the darkness: "Keep on going toward the light at the end of the hall."

An arm swept the newcomer's gun from his raised hand. The captive tried to turn in order to see who held him up, but the automatic was jammed harder against his body. He obeyed instructions meekly enough, and walked the length of the hall, his enemy unseen or unheard but not unfelt.

They stopped at the door beneath which the faint light showed, and the captor spoke again: "Open the door, but don't try any monkey business."

The captive obeyed in silence. The door opened into what was evidently a gentleman's bedroom, to judge from the character of the furnishings. Then the man waved his gun toward an easy-chair and said: "Sit down and make yourself at home."

His captive obeyed, nervously watching the gun in the other man's hand. He ventured to speak: "Put that thing down; it might go off."

The dark man sank into a chair and laid his gun on a table within easy reach of his hand. He surveyed his captive with some contempt. "You must be an amateur at house-breaking. I heard you at the door from way up here."

The other lowered his eyes sheepishly. "I didn't think there was anybody in here."

The man with the gun laughed. "But there was. What's your name?"

"Binkert."

"Not Paddy Binkert?"

The man hesitated an instant. "No, Rolly."

The other man smiled. "It wouldn't have done you any good to lie. I know Paddy; and now I know Rolly. But didn't you pick out big game when you came here?"

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing so big about it that I know of."

"Maybe you don't know whose house you're in."

Binkhert grinned for the first time. "I've been in this joint before. It's Police Commissioner Hyde's."

"You're looking at the Commissioner now," the other man exclaimed.

The intruder stared a moment, then he burst into laughter. "Oh, no, I ain't. You ain't Hyde. I know him when I see him, and besides, Hyde's out of town. I seen him down at the Grand Central buyin' a

ticket for Rochester. That's why I figured it'd be safe for me to pull a job in his house. But you beat me to it. You got the right of way. By the way, what's your name?"

The other smiled and shoved his gun into his pocket. "I know Hyde's off to Rochester," he admitted. "One of my punch trailed him. I never do any trailing 'cause it gives the fly cops a chance to see me. My name's Haines."

Binkert gasped. "Haines? Not Lefty?"

"Nobody else. I came here to give Hyde's dump the once over, take a few of his little trinkets, and leave one of my notes behind for him to read and weep."

"Lefty, you sure have got the nerve. If I hadn't known Hyde you'd a-pulled the wool over my eyes. As it was, I wasn't too sure of myself until you admitted you was Haines."

"What kind of a lookin' guy is Hyde?

"That's the reason I laughed when you said you was Hyde. Where you're kinda light and slender, Hyde is dark and pretty stout. He's about my build."

"Not much of a haul here," said Haines, as he waved a hand around the room. "I'm doing it mostly to have a laugh on Hyde. Everybody knows he has sworn to nab me. Binkert, suppose we clean out Hyde's cute little domicile and split fifty-fifty? What do you say?"

"Suits me. Where do we start?"

Haines picked up a pair of gold-backed brushes from the dresser. "I don't usually bother with such junk, but maybe Hyde'll hate to lose 'em." He extended them toward Binkert. Binkert fumbled in his pocket for an instant, and then made as if to take the brushes from Haines. There was a quick flash of steel, a sharp click—and a pair of shiny handcuffs encircled Haines's slender wrists. Haines was furious. He glared at Binkert. "What's the idea, Binkert? Trying to double-cross me?"

Binkert smiled serenely as he put the brushes back in their proper place on the dresser.

"You made a mistake in the name, Haines; it's not Binkert, it's Hyde. I'm the police commissioner," and he extended a little card in mock courtesy before Haines's glaring eyes. "I'm sorry to catch you red-handed like this, Lefty, but you can't blame a man for not wanting to see his best brushes disappear before his very eyes, can you?"

Haines knew he had lost. "You're pretty clever, Hyde. How did you work it? How'd you know I was here?"

"I saw your pal Whitey at the Grand Central. He seemed to be following my movements very carefully. I got in a coach and out on the other side. Whitey beat it right away and I followed him. He came here, and when he went by the house he dropped his handkerchief. I knew that was a signal of some kind. I came into my own house and you took me for a crook. That's all there was to it. Your pal didn't double-cross you."

"Well," said Haines carelessly, "you cops take a trick once in a while. Lord knows I've made it hot enough for you the last couple of years."

"Of course I win," Hyde grunted. "Now you'll pay for it behind the bars."

ROBBERS RAID A POKER GAME

SIX armed and masked men broke up a poker game of twenty players in the Young Men's League Club at 82 West 119th street up lining up the players and taking from them $2,000 in cash and jewelry.

The players were so intent on their game that they were not aware that the strangers had cut away part of the glass panel of the front door. Through the opening one of the robbers was able to turn the key and open the door. Two of the masked men searched the players while the others held them against the walls at pistol points. The robbers escaped in an automobile.

What Handwriting Reveals

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Send us a specimen of your writing with the coupon printed on page 68 and Miss Rice will analyze the handwriting free of charge. The answer will be published in a future number of this magazine. Only a limited number of replies can be printed in each issue, owing to lack of space. If you desire an earlier reply in the form of a personal letter from Miss Rice, send us the sample of your writing and the coupon, and enclose 10 cents and a self-addressed stamped envelope, to cover the cost of handling, stationery, etc., and Miss Rice will promptly send you an answer. No readings will be given unless accompanied by a coupon for each individual.

—THE EDITOR.

LELA.—No, indeedy! No, I don't think that a woman can love two men at the same time, if by that you mean love them for lovers. You can love a lot of men at the same time if one is your father and others your relatives and friends, but you can't want to marry two men, Lela, and you would soon find that out if you made the experiment. The trouble is that you don't really love either one of 'em! And—by the way—aren't you about seventeen, dear? I think you are, and that the best thing you can do is just to play with the boys you know, like the child that you are, and leave all this to a time when you are grown up. Your handwriting shows me that you have a fine mind and I am sure that you love to read. Well, you set about the task of making yourself a highly educated woman and you will be doing the thing which is best for your future in every way, and which will end in giving you a true marriage—the kind which is not all based on emotion.

BLUE ROBBIE.—That "b" of yours, Robbie, is what graphologists call "the credulous b," meaning that the user of it is too easily taken in. Now that doesn't mean in a business way. Taking into consideration your other elements of character, I am sure that you are quite careful in business matters. I don't think you will ever allow a bunko man to rope you. No; what I mean is that you are too trustful of people for whom you care and to whom you are attracted. You are apt to believe in what such people tell you. As soon as your friendship or your affections are engaged you lose that good judgment which you have for practical matters. Your rightward swing of writing shows that you are very, very affectionate—a beautiful trait, but one which needs to be backed up by a good deal of sternness if it is not to be a weakness. You are a natural-born salesman, and I hope that this is what you are doing. If not, why not?

WILLIAM FITZPATRICK.—The trouble with you is that you are too bad tempered. I don't mean that you have a really bad disposition at all, but that you allow a great many things to irritate you and "fuss" you, so that you are seldom perfectly placid and happy. This does a great deal to hide the fact that you are naturally of a friendly and affectionate disposition and that you have a personality of considerable charm. If you will correct this one fault of yours, in fact, you will find that you have changed all that the future has to offer you. You have great physical courage and more than the average endurance. You are a hard worker and are full of true ambition—the kind which is willing to pay for what is wanted from life. False ambition is the thing which makes a woman or man restless and makes them worry because they have not this and that; true ambition makes up its mind to what is wanted and goes after it.

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THE EDITOR.

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109 "The Brass Button," by Jack Bechdolt.
110 "A Whispering Mummy," by Chas. F. Oursler.
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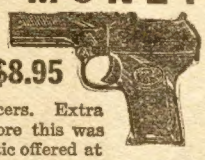

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Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

A long-sought secret, vital to happiness, has been discovered.

By Walter S. Dean

Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
—Omar Khayyam.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An answer to an ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" nor a financial formula. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—human happiness, especially in the later years of life. And there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of the practical where values must be proved. It "works." And because it does work—most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is in its virtue for lifting the physical handicaps resulting from the premature waning of the vital forces of life, whether due to overwork, over-worry, sickness or the general over-expenditure of nervous energy in the strenuous living typical of the modern day. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes

recuperative capacity, and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.

But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of summer too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verse, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search, without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth"—the means for renewing energy and extending the summer time of life.

Now, after many years of research, joyful reports from thousands show that lives clouded by the haze of too early autumn have been illumined by the summer sun of health and joy; old age, in a sense being kept at bay, and the physical and mental vigor of former years again enjoyed in work and recreation. And the discovery which so adds to the joy of living is easily available to every one who feels the need of greater energy and vitality.

The discovery had its origin in famous European laboratories. Brought to America, it was developed into a product that has won the highest praise in thousands of cases, many of which had defied all other treatments. In scientific circles the discovery has been known and used for several years with extraordinary gratifying appreciation for the success it has demonstrated. It is now put up in convenient tablet form, under the name of Korex compound, for distribution to the general public.

Anyone who finds life losing its charm and color or the feebleness of old age coming on years too soon, can obtain full strength treatment of this compound, sufficient for ordinary cases, under a positive guarantee that it costs nothing if it fails to prove satisfactory and only $2 if satisfied. In average cases, the compound usually brings about gratifying improvement in a few days.

Simply write in confidence to the Melton Laboratories, 2178 Melton Bldg., Kansas City, Mo., and this wonder restorative will be mailed to you, sealed in a plain wrapper. You may enclose $2 or, if you prefer, just send your name without money and pay the postman $2 and postage when the parcel is delivered. In either case, if you report within ten days that you are not satisfied, the purchase price will be refunded on request. The Melton Laboratories are nationally known and thoroughly reliable. Moreover, their offer is fully guaranteed so no one need hesitate to accept it. If you need this widely praised and remarkable rejuvenator, write for it today.

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